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Outstanding Natural Area
Activity Plan/Environmental Assessment

July
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As the Nation's principal conservation agency, the Department of the Interior has responsibility for most of our nationally owned public lands and natural resources. This includes fostering the wisest use of our land and water resources, protecting our fish and wildlife, preserving the environmental and cultural values of our national parks and historical places, and providing for the enjoyment of life through outdoor recreation. The Department assesses our energy and mineral resources and works to assure that their development is in the best interests of all our people. The Department also has a major responsibility for American Indian reservation communities and for people who live in Island Territories under U.S. administration.

IN REPLY REFER TO:

United States Department of the Interior

BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT

TAKE PRIDE IN AMERICA

1791

Dear Reviewer:

This publication is composed of the **Activity Plan for the Rocky Mountain Front Range Outstanding Natural Areas (AP)** and the corresponding **Environmental Assessment (EA)**. Please note that these are two separate documents within the same publication. They are intended to be read and used together in that much of the AP text and supporting maps and figures are referenced in the EA text. This was done to expedite our preparation and to reduce cost and volume of the documents.

We are looking forward to your observations and recommendations, a successful planning-environmental documentation effort, and enhancement of public resources management of the Rocky Mountain Front Range ONAs.

We request that you submit any comments you may have to this office by September 4, 1988. Please refer any questions to Marv Hoffer, Lewistown District Office.

Sincerely,

Douglas J. Burger

Douglas J. Burger

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Rocky Mountain Front
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Douglas J. Burger
Great Falls Resource Area Manager

July
1988

SUMMARY

This coordinated activity plan addresses four Outstanding Natural Areas (Blind Horse, Ear Mountain, Chute Mountain, Deep Creek-Battle Creek). These areas total 13,087 acres, and are located on the Montana Rocky Mountain Front Range about 20 miles west of Choteau (see Figure 1).

The ONAs feature massive limestone cliffs and geologic features rising to 7,700 feet from 5,000-foot plains. The prominent geographic features include: Blind Horse Creek, Deep Creek, Battle Creek, Ear Mountain, and Timber Gulch (see Figures 2, 3, 4, and 5). The area is blanketed with conifers, hardwoods, softwoods, shrubs, and grasses. The highly dissected topography supports numerous wildlife and some fisheries; and has a nearly pristine wilderness quality.

The Headwaters Resource Management Plan/Environmental Impact Statement (1984) established broad management direction for these ONAs to "protect the wildlife habitat, scenery and other surface resources from disturbance" and "to ensure they are managed essentially as wilderness." The purpose of this activity plan is to provide specific objectives, constraints, and management policy for all proposed actions on the ONAs. This activity plan does not amend the Headwaters Resource Management Plan. The activity plan will be modified periodically within the National Environmental Policy Act and BLM administrative processes as significant needs arise and resource use thresholds are exceeded.

Six major problems or issues were identified by the staff and public: legal access, seismic activities, resource developments, overnight camping, noxious plants, and fire management and use. This AP is directed at addressing these issues.

The AP was prepared as two separate plans; the No Action Plan and the Preferred Action Plan. This serves the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) requirement for evaluating current circumstances (No Action Plan) and evaluating the BLM-proposed plan.

A substantial number of agency resource use objectives and constraints such as the Endangered Species Act, related Wildlife Recovery Plans, and specific direction from policy, law, and natural circumstances were identified in the HRMP. These have been addressed and incorporated in this AP. The purposes and management direction of this AP is summarized in Appendix 7.

Supplemental resource and information and specific public participation and coordination information is given at the conclusion of the Appendix section.

This AP was prepared by the staff of the Lewistown BLM District Office, Airport Road, Lewistown, Montana; and the Great Falls BLM Resource Area, P.O. Box 2865, Great Falls, Montana.

The following digests summarize each plan.

NO ACTION PLAN

According to the HRMP, the four ONAs are areas of high natural resource values, and are to be managed "essentially as wilderness." This requires specific restrictions on many consumptive activities, either by limiting their functions or exclusion of such actions. This No Action Plan is in effect now as a result of the HRMP, and reflects the current resource management situation.

Legal access to the ONAs exists to: (1) the north end of the Ear Mountain ONA from a county road; (2) the Blind Horse ONA via two limited access trails from the Forest Service-administered area on the west; and (3) the Deep Creek-Battle Creek ONA via a limited access trail from the Lewis and Clark National Forest. Any future public access to the ONAs will only be developed "as the opportunity arises."

Seismic actions and administrative vehicle uses are restricted. Seismic actions would be permitted on a limited, regulated basis. Current oil-gas lease development would be allowed, but leases in "No Lease" areas of the ONAs would not be reoffered upon expiration. When the HRMP is updated or amended, there is the possibility that advances in drilling and exploration technology may allow some of the ONA "No Lease" portions to be leased with No Surface Occupancy stipulations without degrading the outstanding resources, values, and natural characteristics of the ONAs. The ONAs would continue to be open to mineral entry and development.

Livestock use management would be limited, and all livestock leases would be designated as "custodial." No further livestock grazing enhancement projects would be undertaken. Livestock grazing leases would continue at current levels in riparian areas and adjacent steep slopes. Livestock grazing fails to meet wildlife habitat and species objectives in the Deep Creek-Battle Creek ONA.

Recreation would continue without evaluation, support facilities or agency actions.

The 1978 Lewistown District Fire Management Plan would remain in effect. No environmental protection stipulations, such as restricting heavy equipment use, would be enforced. The U.S. Forest Service would continue as the responsible agency for initial action.

PREFERRED PLAN

This plan is the desired ONA management plan, and represents a substantially refined emphasis on specific resource management not found in the No Action (current situation) Plan.

The principle wildlife objectives would be achieved through livestock grazing lease plans. Livestock regulation would be a primary means to enhance riparian communities, fescue grassland benches, and similar environs important as wildlife habitats. Grizzly bear and gray wolf habitats enhancement would be emphasized.

Access development to all ONAs would be secured to permit public use of wildlife resources through hunting, fishing, photography, and viewing.

The Rocky Mountain Front Wildlife Guidelines would be strictly adhered to if seismic activities are proposed. Administrative vehicle access would be permitted for limited activities, including potential livestock operations, seismic activity, and wildlife management.

Camping would be permissible throughout the year, but monitored to determine any detrimental impacts on spring grizzly bear use or winter ungulate use relative to the gray wolf. Camping policy changes would be made in response to monitoring results to protect the wildlife resources.

The visual resources management rating for the ONAs would be changed from Class II to Class I, except for trailheads. Specific guidelines and restrictions would be applied to all ONAs to implement the off-road vehicle (ORV) designations and closures throughout all ONAs (see Figures 10-13 in Appendix 6). No cross-country travel would be permitted. Camping would be permitted throughout all ONAs, except at the Ear Mountain trailhead. All ONA boundaries would be signed for avoidance areas, ORV regulation, noxious plant control and essential information. Trailheads would be developed as ONA access is acquired, with various degrees of public facilities at each. Camping would be precluded within 200 feet of all springs or similar water sources.

Livestock regulation would be intensified to improve general vegetation communities; to enhance the grizzly bear and gray wolf prey base; and to improve general wildlife habitats. Livestock forage would be evaluated and monitored to better manage BLM-administered lands.

The Preferred Action Plan would focus on livestock and range resource management by implementing more intensive grazing practices to protect the forage from grazing during part of the growth season. Season-of-use restrictions, herding or (as a last alternative) fencing from grazing will be implemented where grazing pasture management is not practical. The Preferred Action Plan livestock management practices for each grazing allotment in the ONAs are shown on Table 1.

TABLE 1

PREFERRED PLAN LIVESTOCK MANAGEMENT PRACTICES

Allotment	Method of Grazing	Preferred Management Category	Range Improvement
Chicken Coulee	Pasture Rotation (exists)	I (improve)	Yes
East Front	Pasture Rotation	I (improve)	Yes
Cow Track	Season Restriction	M (maintain)	No
Green Timber	Herding	I (improve)	No
McCarthy	Season Restriction	C (Custodial)	No
Ear Mountain-TNC	Season Restriction	M (maintain)	No

Integrated pest management methods would be used to control noxious plants, with an emphasis on biological control agents.

Cultural resources would not be inventoried on the ONAs, but site specific evaluations would be required for all proposed actions in the ONAs to ensure resource data integrity. Avoidance of located cultural resources would be the required procedure.

Air quality in the ONAs is currently Class II and the BLM is obligated by law to maintain that without exception. Oil-gas activities, prescribed burning, and other pollutant generating, federally sanctioned actions would meet air quality standards.

Oil-gas exploration and development would be managed as they were prior to the HRMP. Minimal regulation criteria were applied to the ONAs when leased in the early 1970s. Oil-gas leases issued in the "No Lease" portions of the ONAs would not be reoffered upon lease expiration. The ultimate objective is to have only the 1/4-mile border of each ONA under lease. When the HRMP is updated or amended, there is the possibility that advances in drilling and exploration technology may allow some of the ONA No Lease portions to be leased with NSO stipulations without degrading the outstanding resources, values, and natural characteristics of the ONAs. All oil-gas leases would be required to meet the RMF Wildlife Guidelines. The ONAs would remain open to mineral entry and development, and there would be no removal of common saleable minerals (gravel, sand, rock).

Water quality would be maintained or improved to meet wildlife, fisheries, and public water quality needs. BLM would claim all water rights within the ONAs. All vegetative increases would be dedicated to wildlife and watershed resources. Oil-gas activities must meet federal water quality standards.

Wildfire, prescribed burning, and fuel management would be directed to maintain or improve the current visual resources, wildlife habitat, excellent watersheds, and public uses of these essentially wilderness ONAs.

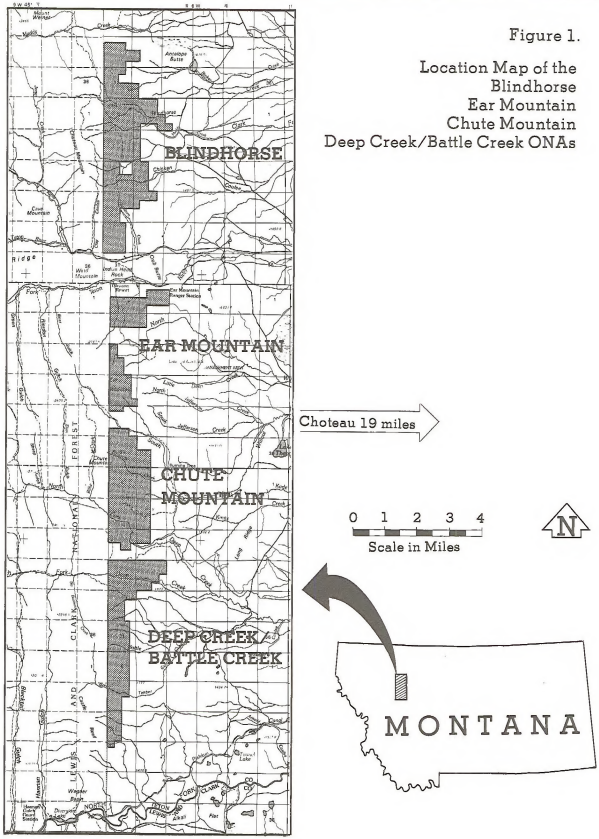


Figure 1.

Location Map of the
Blindhorse
Ear Mountain
Chute Mountain
Deep Creek/Battle Creek ONAs

Blind Horse
Outstanding Natural Area

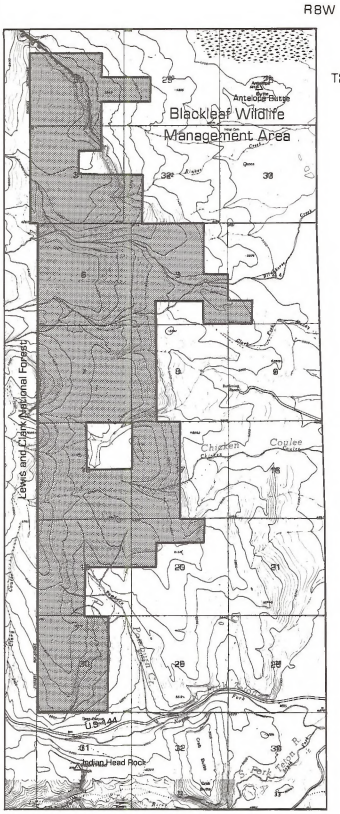


Figure 2. Topographic Map.

ONA Area

NORTH

0 1 2 Miles

0 1 2 3 Kilometers

1:63,360

Ear Mountain
Outstanding Natural Area

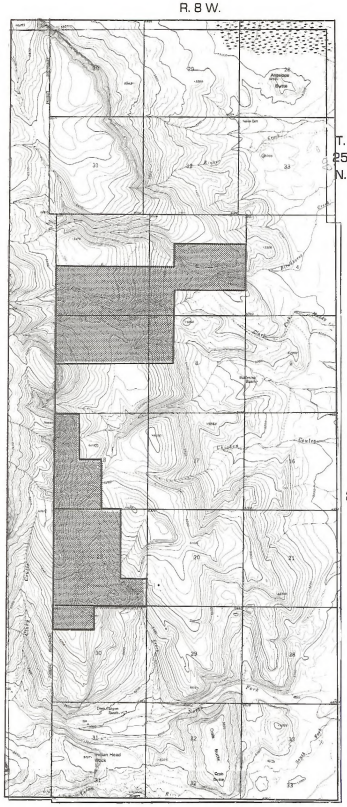


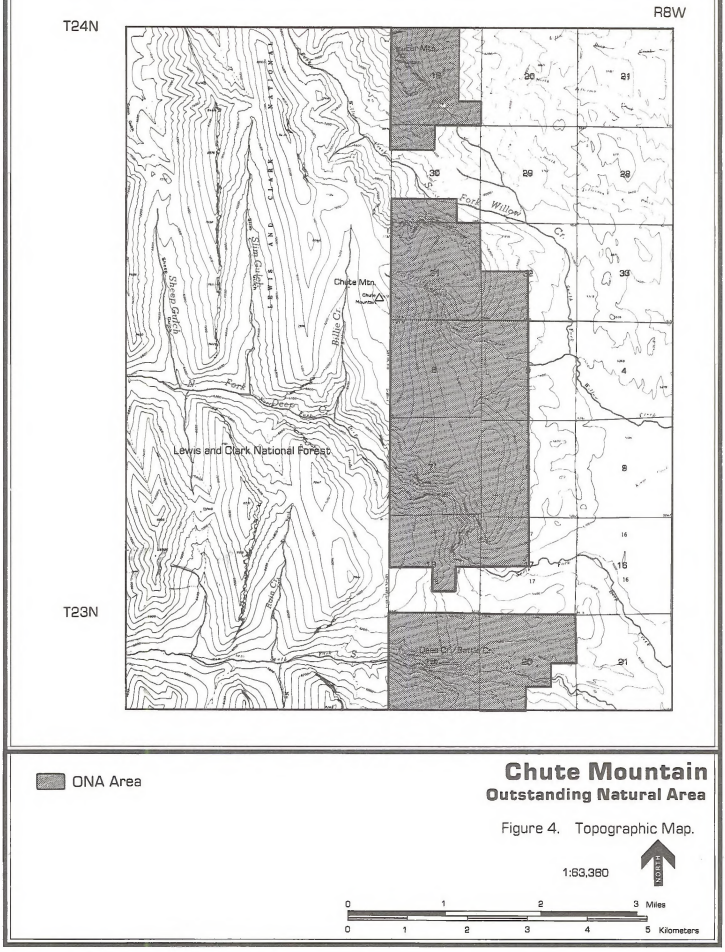
Figure 3. Topographic Map.

ONA Area

NORTH

0 1 2 Miles

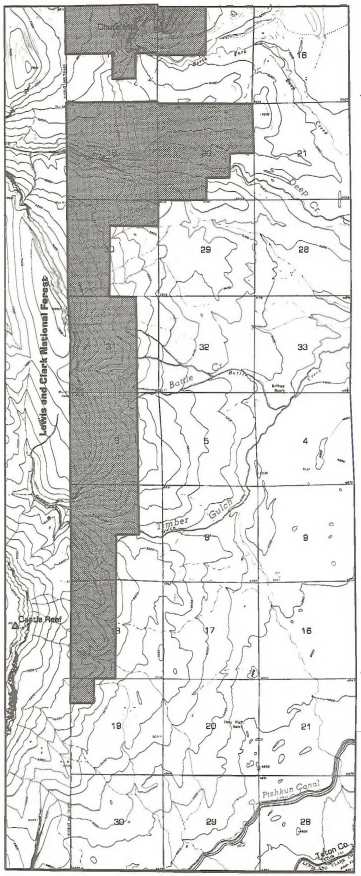
0 1 2 3 Kilometers


T24N
R8W
T23N
Chute Mtn.
Lewis and Clark National Forest
Four Willow Cr.
Billie Cr.
Ford
Ford Cr.
Deer Cr.
Sheep Gulch
Silver Creek
Silver Creek Mtn.
Elk Creek
Elk Creek Mtn.
Dean Cr.
Bear Cr.
Deep Cr.
Dean Cr. / Bear Cr.
Chute Mountain
ONA Area
Chute Mountain
Outstanding Natural Area
Figure 4. Topographic Map.
1:63,360
NORTH
0 1 2 3 Miles
0 1 2 3 4 5 Kilometers

Deep Creek/ Battle Creek

Outstanding Natural Area

Figure 5. Topographic Map.



ONA Area

NORTH

0 1 2

0 1 2 3

1:63,360

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ACRONYMS

AMP—Allotment Management Plan
AP—Activity Plan
BCF—Billion Cubic Feet
BLM—Bureau of Land Management
BMU—Bear Management Unit
CEM—Cumulative Effects Model
DSL—Montana Department of State Lands
EA—Environmental Assessment
EIS—Environmental Impact Statement
EO—Executive Order
HMP—Habitat Management Plan
HRMP—Headwaters Resource Management Plan
MDFWP—Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks
NEPA—National Environmental Policy Act
NSO—No Surface Occupancy
ONA—Outstanding Natural Area
ORV—Off-Road Vehicle
PPM—Parts Per Million
RMA—Recreation Management Area
RMF—Rocky Mountain Front
RMP—Resource Management Plan
ROS—Recreation Opportunity Spectrum
SCS—Soil Conservation Service
SHPO—State Historic Preservation Office
SRMA—Special Recreation Management Area
USFS—U. S. Forest Service
USFWS—U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service
VRM—Visual Resource Management

INTRODUCTION

The Headwaters Resource Management Plan/Environmental Impact Statement (EIS), July 1984, and the subsequent Record of Decision (ROD) designated four Outstanding Natural Areas (ONAs) on the Rocky Mountain Front, Teton County, Montana (See Figures 2-5). The acreage for each ONA is:

1. Blind Horse	4,927 acres
2. Ear Mountain	1,869 acres*
3. Chute Mountain	3,205 acres
4. Deep Creek-Battle Creek	3,086 acres
Total	13,087 acres

*A planning amendment to the Headwaters RMP/EIS, December 1986, added 1,029 acres of acquired land to the Ear Mountain ONA. A 12.75-acre area was designated as a multiple-use area for a trailhead, and is not included in the ONA.

Outstanding Natural Areas are defined in 43 CFR 2071.1 as: "Areas of outstanding scenic splendor, natural wonder, or scientific importance that merit special attention and care in management to ensure their preservation in their natural condition. These usually are relatively undisturbed, representative of rare botanical, geological or zoological characteristics of principal interest for scientific and research purposes."

The HRMP established that these ONAs be managed to: "protect the wildlife habitat, scenery and other surface resources from disturbance . . .", and to ensure that most programs are "managed essentially as wilderness" (Alternative A, Preferred, p. iii, Final Headwaters EIS).

This multi-resource coordinated Activity Plan (AP) will not amend the Headwaters Resource Management Plan (HRMP). This AP is governed by the broad objectives, policy, and management direction derived from the HRMP.

A primary end product of this AP, relative to each resource, is to establish concise and functional policy direction with supporting appendices, maps, and explicit information. This will enable the public and the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) staff to readily determine the correct management direction for any resource use situation.

This AP will be modified periodically as significant needs arise. Any modification will be consistent with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and the BLM administrative processes.

LOCATION AND SETTING

The four ONAs, which total 13,087 acres, adjoin the western edge of the Lewis and Clark National Forest. The Bob Marshall Wilderness, administered by the Forest Service, lies about 6 miles west of the ONAs. The ONAs are located approximately 19 miles west of Choteau, Montana (see Figure 1).

The Rocky Mountain Front Range (RMF) rises dramatically from the plains. Elevation changes are precipitous, and range from 5,100 to 7,700 feet on the ONAs. The ONAs are characterized by steep, rocky cliffs; narrow, deep canyons; talus slopes; open meadows; shrub-grasslands; and numerous streams, both perennial and ephemeral. Massive limestone formations including pinnacles dominate many vistas.

Some prominent geographic features of the ONAs include: Blind Horse Creek, Chute Mountain, the North and South Forks of Deep Creek, Deep Creek Canyon, Willow Creek, Edwards Creek, Battle Creek, Timber Gulch, and Ear Mountain.

Most of the ONAs are forested with limber pine, Douglas-fir, subalpine fir and aspen. Alpine meadows, foothills prairie, and barren areas support mountain shrubs, sedges, grasses, numerous flowering perennials, and forbs.

The ONAs have a high overall wilderness quality. They are nearly pristine, with outstanding opportunities for both solitude and primitive recreation. There are few human intrusions evident today, although heavy equipment used for seismic work in the early 1950's left visible scars. A limited number of internal access trails and primitive vehicle ways exist on all the ONAs. Various livestock fences also exist on three ONAs.

The grizzly bear, bald eagle, gray wolf, and peregrine falcon are either threatened or endangered species that occur, or are suspected to occur, in the ONAs. The ONAs provide seasonal habitat or year-long habitat for elk, mule deer, mountain goat, bighorn sheep, black bear, numerous raptors, mountain grouse, and passerine species, as well as year-long aquatic habitat for native cutthroat and rainbow trout.

All the ONAs, except Ear Mountain, have internal trails which afford an almost unlimited opportunity for non-vehicular travel. These horse and human foot trails provide public opportunities for rock climbing, camping, fishing, day hiking, backpacking, horseback riding, snowshoeing, cross-country skiing, hunting, photography, bird watching, rock hounding, and solitude.

Cultural resources along the RMF consist of prehistoric and historic remains dating from 11,000 years ago to the advent of the Modern Era in the 1920s. Most of the prehistoric remains represent aboriginal campsites and special activity sites such as: quarries for extracting stone for tool making; areas for gathering religious and medicinal plants; areas and structures for hunting various game and fur-bearing animals; and structures for conducting religious ceremonies. Historic remains consist of mining sites (including adits, cabins, mills, prospect holes, water developments, kilns and mining towns) and sites related to late 19th century Euro-American settlement such as ranch buildings, irrigation projects, line shacks, and roads.

The ONAs have not been inventoried for cultural resources, but if they follow the general pattern for the RMF, they probably contain prehistoric campsites and special activity sites in limited quantities. Although not professionally documented, one prehistoric campsite is known to exist in the Blind Horse ONA. It is expected that some of the higher prominences also support aboriginal religious sites (vision quest structures). The only historic site or feature known in the ONAs is a water diversion structure or flume in the vicinity of Chute Mountain. Other historic sites are probably rare in the ONAs because of the terrain and lack of suitable resources for extraction by Euro-Americans (mining resources, timber, agricultural lands, etc.).

The ONAs are largely leased for oil and gas, and are considered to have a high development potential for gas. Much of the adjacent national forest on the west side of the ONAs is leased for oil and gas.

The four ONAs are cataloged under the Lewistown District recreation program as Special Recreation Management Areas (SRMAs), MT-068018. This means certain recreational values in the areas have been recognized and that management objectives have been established to protect and/or enhance the particular resources. These units are currently ranked 5th out of the 20 BLM recreation management areas (RMAs) in the district and in the top 25% statewide.

The visual resource management (VRM) rating for the public land along the Rocky Mountain Front Range is Class II. Any developments or activities authorized in the ONAs would conform to mitigative measures approved in the contrast rating evaluation to preserve the excellent scenic quality.

The recreation opportunity spectrum (ROS) for the ONAs consists of two categories. The areas along the existing roads within the ONAs are considered semi-primitive motorized; and the remaining BLM-administered land is semi-primitive non-motorized. These classes are defined in the ROS Users Guide, USDA Forest Service, 1982.

PLAN PURPOSES

The HRMP does not provide specific direction for full plan implementation. This multi-resource coordinated Activity Plan will provide the BLM and public with that specific ONA management direction.

The HRMP directs land use allocations or objectives for resource programs through the resolution of specific issues. This AP is required to fully implement the management direction of the RMP for the Rocky Mountain Front ONAs.

Some of the RMF, which covers an expansive area along the eastern side of the Continental Divide, has been and continues to be an area of considerable human activity. Oil and gas exploration and development has occurred in the past 35 or more years, and the future appears to hold more of the same. Livestock interests have most of the area under lease. However, more active management of livestock grazing on BLM-administered land is necessary. Outdoor recreation is a primary activity throughout the year. Dude ranching, photography, hiking, fishing, cross-country skiing, and hunting are the major recreational uses.

The scenic quality and wildland resources are the primary values that resulted in designation of these four areas as ONAs. Threatened and endangered wildlife, such as the grizzly bear and gray wolf and their habitats, are an integral part of these areas.

The preservation and enhancement of these resource values constitutes the major management objectives to be followed in this Activity Plan.

Because these four ONAs are similar in biotic and abiotic resources and are geographically close to one another, one Activity Plan will be prepared to address the four ONAs.

IDENTIFICATION OF MAJOR ISSUES

The following subjects were identified by public responses and internal agency review to the question: "What are the major or significant problems that the BLM and the public must address in the preparation of this AP?"

1. There is no legal or physical public access to the Deep Creek-Battle Creek, Chute Mountain, and Blind Horse ONAs (from the eastern slopes).

Two associated questions are:

"Should trail development for pack strings and hiking take place after public access is secured to an ONA?"

"Should seasonal restrictions be applied to access roads/trails to prevent harassment of bighorn sheep and mule deer in the winter, or grizzly bear during the spring?"

2. To what extent should seismic exploration be allowed in the ONAs?

3. What type of resource developments should be allowed within the ONAs?

Examples include: Range (livestock) facilities such as fences, water developments; wildlife improvements such as riparian protection fences; recreation site management facilities such as parking, garbage collection, boundary and facility signing; and other development such as pipelines and powerlines.

4. Should overnight camping be allowed, or day use only?

5. How will noxious plants (weeds) be controlled?

6. How should wildfire be controlled; and should prescribed fire be permitted for wildlife habitat or livestock forage improvements?

RESOURCE MANAGEMENT OBJECTIVES

The following management direction derived from the HRMP establishes generic and specific objectives for the ONAs. Please refer to Appendix 1 for the compendium of HRMP management direction.

WILDLIFE AND FISHERIES

This AP will provide protection and management direction for: unique plants in the ONAs; the critical habitat of the threatened grizzly bear; prey base habitat for the endangered gray wolf; and important seasonal habitat for numerous wildlife species including elk, mountain goat, deer, bighorn sheep, black bear, mountain lion plus various raptors and upland birds. An inventory of rare-unique plants is scheduled for completion in the summer of 1988, in cooperation with the Montana Natural Heritage Foundation "challenge grant funding program."

BLM policy objectives from the HRMP are listed in Sections 1-13 of Appendix 1.

The overall objective of a Rocky Mountain Front Range Wildlife Habitat Management Plan developed in the early 1970s, was to improve or maintain habitat for approximately 200 species of wildlife. Some objectives of that draft document have been accomplished and need not be carried forward, while other objectives relate to areas outside the ONAs and will not be discussed in this Activity Plan. However, other objectives are still applicable and valid for the ONA wildlife and are carried forward as listed below by species. Some modifications of objectives, to reflect current data and situations, have been made.

The wildlife and fisheries objectives from the HRMP are to:

BIGHORN SHEEP

Improve habitat conditions and provide adequate forage on the Deep Creek winter range in order to maintain a bighorn sheep population of 150 to 175.

Improve winter range conditions and provide adequate forage on the Sun River, east of Gibson Dam, to maintain the bighorn sheep population of approximately 250.

Determine the feasibility of expanding and/or improving available bighorn sheep winter/spring habitat by reducing the dense forest canopy and increasing grass, forb, and shrub composition in the Deep Creek area.

Improve 800 acres of federal bighorn sheep winter/spring habitat between the North Fork of Deep Creek and Edwards Creek by increasing the Idaho fescue and total forb composition from 15% and 8% respectively to 30% and 15% respectively by the year 2000.

Acquire additional bighorn sheep winter/spring range through a land exchange program.

Continue with cooperative Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife, and Parks (MDFW&P) and BLM vegetative studies on federal bighorn sheep habitat to evaluate and monitor habitat composition, condition, trend, utilization levels, and interspecific competition between domestic livestock and bighorn sheep.

Improve Idaho fescue composition and vigor for bighorn sheep winter/spring forage on the lower elevation Deep Creek winter range area by the year 2000. The bighorn sheep habitats will be evaluated at least annually on transect 107 using the Daubenmire (1959) methodology.

Continue with the Chicken Coulee livestock grazing allotment management plan (AMP), as implemented, to provide adequate forage for the bighorn sheep population now established there.

MULE AND WHITE-TAILED DEER

Maintain existing creeping juniper stands and plant productivity on the Sun River-Green Timber Gulch, Deep Creek Creek, Ear Mountain, and Chicken Coulee winter/spring ranges at no less than 10% canopy coverage and no more than 20% dead crown measured annually, using the Daubenmire (1959) method.

Improve deer summer habitat conditions by providing potable water sources within 1/2 mile of any point on federal land within the ONAs by 1990.

Improve habitat conditions and provide adequate forage on the Chicken Coulee winter/spring range in order to maintain a mule and white-tailed deer population of 300 to 350.

ROCKY MOUNTAIN GOAT

Improve habitat conditions and provide adequate forage on the Deep Creek and Ear Mountain areas in order to increase the mountain goat population from 50 to 75 by the year 2000.

Assist the MDFW&P in meeting Montana Strategic Plan objectives by improving habitat conditions and providing adequate forage on the Choteau Mountain-Chicken Coulee yearlong habitat area in order to increase mountain goat numbers to approximately 25-30 by the year 2000.

ROCKY MOUNTAIN ELK

Improve bunchgrass composition and vigor for elk winter/spring forage on the Deep Creek area from 13% to 20% by the year 2000. This wildlife winter habitat will be evaluated biannually on transect 107, using the Daubenmire (1959) methodology.

Maintain elk winter/spring habitat in Green Timber Gulch (Boadle grazing lease) at the present composition of 15% grasses and 13% forbs. This elk winter habitat will be evaluated annually on transect 110, SE¼SW¼, Section 18, T. 22 N., R. 8 W., using the Daubenmire (1959) methodology.

THREATENED OR ENDANGERED, NONGAME, AND SPECIES OF SPECIAL INTEREST OR CONCERN

Comply with all management restrictions and participate in described goals and monitoring efforts for both the threatened grizzly bear and endangered gray wolf, as given in the recovery plans.

Utilize guidance for management of grizzly bear and grizzly bear habitats as given in both the Interagency Grizzly Bear Committee and RMF Task Force Wildlife Guidelines.

Utilize guidance for management of prey species of the gray wolf as presented in the RMF Wildlife Guidelines.

Improve habitat conditions and provide herbaceous forage in riparian communities important as grizzly bear spring and summer habitats to assist in grizzly bear recovery. Refer to the Administrative Access Section in the Preferred Plan description for specific seasonal limits on ORV access in support of this recovery plan.

THE FOLLOWING GRIZZLY BEAR MANAGEMENT GUIDELINES FROM THE RMF TASK FORCE PUBLICATION WILL BE USED AND ARE SPECIFICALLY ORIENTED TOWARD LIVESTOCK GRAZING:

Livestock grazing in riparian communities will be deferred each year until after July 1.

Cattle will be removed from pastures grazed after July 1, before the riparian forage base is reduced by 50% either by grazing or plant structure damage.

Exceptions to the July 1 livestock use date can be made when a pasture is part of a grazing system that does not cause a decrease in the condition or size of the riparian plant communities.

Fencing riparian habitats that receive high bear use, to exclude livestock grazing and trampling, may be necessary where livestock turn-out dates prior to July are allowed.

Boneyards and livestock dumps are prevalent along the RMF and are frequented by grizzly bears. Ranchers and landowners will be encouraged to place livestock carcasses and garbage at remote areas of their land. Dead livestock should be moved a considerable distance from calving grounds to discourage bears from feeding on carrion and newborn calves. The Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks has an active program to remove livestock carcasses to acceptable locations.

THE FOLLOWING RESEARCH/MANAGEMENT RECOMMENDATIONS WILL BE CONSIDERED AS LIVESTOCK ALLOTMENT MANAGEMENT PLANS ARE UPDATED.

The condition and trend of all riparian plant communities and their production of sharptooth Angelica, cow parsnip, and western sweet-cicely need to be determined on all RMF public lands grazed by livestock.

Development of special-use pastures is recommended where the condition of riparian plant communities needs improvement. A special-use pasture will be developed where large areas of riparian habitat are enclosed so an adequate forage base will be available to allow stocking rates compatible with livestock operations. Exclosures will be considered if riparian areas are too small. These pastures should be grazed only after July 1, and the livestock should be removed before the use of riparian vegetation reaches 50% or the special use pasture should be incorporated into a deferred rest-rotation system similar to that described by Marlow (1985). Some other methods which may reduce negative impacts to riparian habitats include: development of alternate water sources, placing of salt away from riparian areas, and improved herding practices.

Reestablishment of riparian areas should be attempted where the abundance of important plant species used by grizzlies for cover (aspen, cottonwood, and birch) or food has been reduced.

Protect all identified raptor nesting sites and adjacent habitat by using the RMF Wildlife Guidelines. BLM will continue with inventories to locate additional nesting sites.

From the generic objectives of the HRMP to the more specific objectives of the 1980 Draft Wildlife Habitat Management Plan it is apparent that wildlife objectives can largely be met through implementation of proper grazing management practices on the ONAs, particularly the East Front allotment. Allotment grazing management plans which will meet wildlife objectives are given in the grazing management section of this document.

Additional protection and mitigation to meet ONA wildlife resource objectives can be met by adherence to the RMF Wildlife Guidelines.

RECREATION

Recreation objectives are to:

Continue to provide substantial opportunities for outstanding solitude when considered in relation to the nearby Lewis and Clark National Forest and the Bob Marshall Wilderness.

Maintain the VRM Class II guidelines currently in effect for the ONAs and retain the existing character of the landscape.

Provide trailhead development at each access point to the ONAs, with varying degrees of development and size of trailhead as the following examples indicate: parking (type of surface, size); sanitation (toilets, garbage); picnic tables; fire rings; potable water; signs (boundary, sites or facilities); trails (hiking, horseback, non-motorized mountain bike).

Provide visitors with a satisfying recreational experience in the ONAs within the semi-primitive, non-motorized ROS class.

Identify specific guidelines for ORV use, including a road network for administrative use and the type of administrative use authorized.

Provide access for hikers, horses, and non-motorized mountain bikes with minimum trail construction and maintenance.

Provide for day-use and overnight camping within the ONAs.

Identify federal lands (ONA boundaries) by signing and inform the visitor of ONA restrictions.

Mark designated routes for use under administrative access.

Allow minimal decrease in ROS ratings (less than 10 acres).

RANGE-LIVESTOCK

The range (livestock) objectives are to provide federal forage to satisfy the existing livestock needs on six ONA allotments in a manner that will not diminish or damage other resources and ONA values; maintain/improve the soil, watershed, and riparian habitat condition; and will benefit wildlife species, including threatened and endangered species. Proposed range developments would not detract from the scenic, wilderness, or recreational values, but would attain the resource objectives.

More specific and measurable objectives have been written for each allotment in the Preferred Plan description in this document.

CULTURAL RESOURCES

The purpose of the cultural resource management prescription is to provide protection for archeological, historical, and paleontological resources for future scientific use and public enjoyment. This will be accomplished through inventories of all proposed project areas in the ONAs and subsequent avoidance or mitigation of impacts to any significant cultural resources identified. Cultural resources are fragile, non-renewable, and ever dwindling in quality and quantity across the nation. Their protection is mandated by the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (as amended), and associated federal regulations.

The BLM will continue to inventory cultural resources in advance of all surface disturbing activities to avoid any cultural resources or mitigate the impacts of surface disturbances. Development proposals must consider that significant sites may be identified in "sensitive areas" (prominent topographic features such as high escarpments, mountaintops, canyons, and stream bottoms where they emerge from steep terrain). Identified cultural resources must be recorded and evaluated under the National Register of Historic Places eligibility criteria, in consultation with the Montana State Historic Preservation Officer and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation.

AIR QUALITY

Air Quality objectives are to:

Evaluate air quality on an individual basis as part of project level planning, attaching appropriate stipulations as necessary to maintain the Class II airshed rating.

OIL-GAS AND MINERALS

Oil-gas and minerals objectives are to:

Allow seismic exploration, utilizing motorized vehicle/equipment on designated roads/trails, while retaining the existing character and features of the ONAs.

Continue to lease the ONA boundaries (1/4-mile wide) with No Surface Occupancy stipulations, while not leasing the interior cores of the ONAs.

LANDS

All federal land within the ONAs will be managed as avoidance areas for utility and transportation corridors. Federal land within avoidance areas will not be available for utility and transportation corridor development. Exceptions may be permitted based on consideration of the following criteria: type of and need for facility proposed; conflicts with other resource values and uses including potential values and uses; and availability of alternatives and/or mitigation measures.

Additional objectives are to:

Continue to pursue private land acquisition on a "willing seller" basis.

Terminate new cases of unauthorized use immediately.

Pursue access acquisition on a priority basis, capitalizing on easement acquisition of existing roads. Condemnation authority will be used when landowner negotiations fail to produce an acceptable access route.

Protect existing access to public lands from closure.

WATERSHED

Watershed objectives are to:

Continue to evaluate soil and water resources, on an individual basis, as part of project level planning.

Maintain or improve water quality in accordance with state and federal standards.

Design management activities in riparian zones and wetlands to maintain or improve the habitat condition.

Avoid to the extent possible, road and utility corridor construction associated with valid existing oil and gas rights in riparian areas and steep terrain.

SOILS

Soils objectives are to:

Manage soils to maintain productivity and to minimize erosion.

Continue to evaluate soil and water resources on an individual basis as part of project level planning.

ADMINISTRATIVE ACCESS

Administrative access objectives are to:

Allow livestock permittees access on designated roads/trails only by permit, to administer their livestock lease.

Allow seismic activity conducted by ground-traveling motorized vehicles on designated roads/trails only on a permitted basis.

Allow agency personnel administrative vehicular access on designated roads/trails only for project and range allotment monitoring, wildlife habitat management, and resource use evaluations.

RESOURCE MANAGEMENT CONSTRAINTS

The following constraints must be adhered to while fulfilling the management objectives identified above. Refer to Appendix 1 for a more complete listing of generic and specific management direction from the HRMP.

WILDLIFE AND FISHERIES

Constraints placed on wildlife management by other resource considerations are limited. The most significant constraint is that livestock grazing management has been less than effective on federal lands in two of the four ONAs. Wildlife habitats might be in better condition if livestock grazing was not allowed.

Other constraints could result from managing the ONAs "essentially as wilderness" and could affect wildlife project work if such projects were determined to impair the natural qualities of the ONAs. This is highly unlikely because unobtrusive enclosures and spring developments can be developed. Wildlife habitat is a primary ONA value.

Wildlife management has significantly constrained other resource programs, especially minerals, as identified in the special leasing stipulations of the HRMP. Adherence to the Rocky Mountain Front Wildlife Guidelines also constrains other resource programs.

RECREATION

The ONAs are closed to all motorized vehicles (all ORVs, motorized bikes, snowmobiles, ATVs, Quads, used for human transport) so as to retain the natural characteristics and fragile land types of the ONAs, and to meet the broad HRMP direction "to protect the wildlife habitat, scenery and other surface resources from disturbance" and "to ensure they are managed essentially as wilderness." Administrative access may be allowed by the authorized officer, for those purposes defined in 43 CFR 8340.05(a) and BLM manual 8342.06(c) and specifically permitted by BLM. Please refer to the Administrative Access Section, in the No Action and Preferred Plan descriptions of this document for more information.

The current BLM manual guidance provides for trailhead location within the ONA boundary as an exception to the ORV closure.

Mountain bikes (non-motorized) are permissible within the ONA boundaries.

BLM-administered land adjacent to, and including the ONAs, is not available for motorcycle events.

The federal lands in the ONAs will be retained in public ownership. This allows for the investment of public funds for new recreation developments such as the trailheads and maintenance of the internal trail system.

Management prescriptions in the AP need to conform with the guidelines of the applicable ROS class in relation to type of activities, settings, and experience opportunities (ROS User Guide, USFS 1982).

Administrative ORV use will be limited to designated routes. No cross-country travel is permissible.

The use of trails may be restricted in early spring and at higher elevations to avoid damage to wet and soft ground. The public is to stay on existing trails, and avoid cutting across switchbacks to reduce erosion and soil loss.

No overnight camping will be allowed at Ear Mountain trailhead. Constraints on future sites will be assessed on an individual basis.

The BLM will use a minimal number of signs and materials and locate them to fit VRM classification guidelines for the ONA. VRM contrast ratings will be completed for any proposed projects in the ONAs.

RANGE-LIVESTOCK

Livestock grazing will be permitted on federal lands in the ONAs in accordance with the HRMP and this Activity Plan (see Figures 6-8, in Appendix 2).

Table 2 shows the ONA tracts that are to remain unleased for livestock grazing as determined in the HRMP.

TABLE 2

ONA AREAS NOT AVAILABLE FOR LIVESTOCK GRAZING LEASES
(As Directed By The HRMP)

ONA Leased Tract	Unleased Unit	Acres	
Blind Horse	Pamburn	192.25	T. 25 N., R. 8 W., Section 19, Lot 4; Section 30, Lots 1, 2, 3
Ear Mountain	Ear Mountain	550.2	T. 24 N., R. 8 W., Section 18, Lots 1, 2, 3, E½SW1/4; Section 19, Lots 1, 2, 3, E½NW¼, W½NE¼, NE¼SW¼, NE¼SE¼
Blind Horse	Rinker Creek	680	T. 26 N., R. 8 W., Section 29, NW¼SW¼, Section 30, S½NW¼SW¼, W½SE¼, NE¼SE¼, SW¼NE¼; Section 31, NW¼NE¼, SE¼; Section 32, NW¼SW¼

These tracts are reserved for bighorn sheep habitat and to provide forage for wintering mule deer, mountain goat and species protected under the Threatened and Endangered Species Act (gray wolf).

The Preferred Plan limits the class of livestock in the ONAs to cattle and horses. Grazing sheep and/or goats in the ONAS would not be allowed because of the grizzly bear habitat requirements. The livestock class policy would follow the guidelines recommended by Interagency Grizzly Bear Guidelines and the Rocky Mountain Front Wildlife Guidelines (also interagency).

Oil-GAS AND MINERALS

The "No Surface Occupancy" stipulation will continue to be attached to new oil-gas leases (see Figures 14-21, Appendix 3). Valid existing mineral (oil-gas) rights will apply until these leases expire, at which time new lease stipulations will be applied if the leases are reoffered.

All federal land within the ONAs will remain open to mineral (hardrock) entry under the HRMP. The HRMP would have to be amended and the ONAs withdrawn from mineral entry to exclude hardrock mining from the ONAs.

An approved Plan of Operations will be required on all activities (43 CFR 3809.1-4(b)3), except casual use (as defined in 43 CFR 3809.1-2). "Operations" includes all activity associated with exploration, assessment work, development and processing of mineral deposits located under the mining law.

Bonding will be required on all operations, except for casual use in order to ensure adequate rehabilitation.

Rehabilitation measures will take into consideration the replacement of habitat valuable as wildlife food and cover.

In order to accommodate mining operations while protecting important wildlife habitat, timing restrictions may be applied to mining operations on an individual basis to prevent unnecessary and undue degradation.

Mining operations located in crucial wildlife habitat may be required to rehabilitate old disturbances prior to initiating new surface disturbing activities. This action would enhance the ability of mining operations to continue while rehabilitating critical wildlife habitat at the earliest possible opportunity.

There will be no removal of common variety minerals (e.g., sand, gravel, rock) within the ONAs.

Geophysical (seismic) exploration within the ONAs will be considered on an individual basis in response to Notices of Intent. Seismic activity will be permitted when proposals are in compliance with applicable federal statutes, the Rocky Mountain Front Wildlife Guidelines, the Endangered Species Act, and management direction from the HRMP/EIS and this Activity Plan.

No cross-country motorized travel for seismic exploration will be allowed.

Geochemical exploration will be reviewed on an individual basis in the same manner as seismic activities, including the submission of a Notice of Intent to conduct such activities.

LANDS

Motorized Vehicle Access: Blind Horse, Ear Mountain, Chute Mountain and Deep Creek-Battle Creek ONAs are closed to motorized vehicle (autos, trucks, motor bikes, snowmobiles, and other forms of motorized equipment designed for human transport) access. New roads within the ONAs will not be permitted, except where valid existing oil and gas leases require a road to develop the lease. The No Lease or No Surface Occupancy stipulation will apply upon expiration of present leases. Interior trails for pedestrian and horse traffic are permissible within the ONAs.

Access By Aircraft: Aircraft shall be limited to a minimum altitude of 500 feet over the ONAs, except search and rescue aircraft.

All public land in the four ONAs will be retained in public ownership.

No communication site rights-of-way will be allowed in the ONAs.

WATERSHED

Water quality will be maintained or improved in accordance with state and federal standards. Management activities in riparian zones and wetlands will be designed to maintain or improve the habitat condition.

Roads resulting from oil-gas development on valid existing leases and utility corridors will avoid riparian areas to the extent practical.

Stream crossings resulting from oil-gas development on valid existing leases will adhere to Montana Department Fish, Wildlife & Parks regulations regarding construction projects in or near fishing waters.

FORESTRY

No timber harvest, post and pole cutting, timber improvement practices, firewood cutting, or Christmas tree cutting will be permitted on the ONAs.

ADMINISTRATIVE ACCESS

All administrative access is restricted to designated roads and trails on a permit basis.

RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PROGRAM

This AP is organized as two potential activity plans: the NO ACTION PLAN (current situation) and the PREFERREO PLAN. Both are within the confines of HRMP direction. BLM is not amending the HRMP with this Activity Plan.

NO ACTION PLAN

WILDLIFE AND FISHERIES

Even though direction has been given in the HRMP to implement an AMP on the East Front allotment (similar direction was given in the Old Malta and Missoula District Management Framework Plans in 1974 and 1975, respectively), BLM has not been able to intensively manage livestock in this allotment. BLM and the livestock grazing lessee have been unable to agree on an acceptable livestock grazing program to date. Failure to do so has resulted in serious degradation of important bighorn sheep range, grizzly bear riparian habitats, and a probable Upper Missouri River Basin cutthroat trout fishery in the South Fork of Deep Creek.

This plan will continue rest-rotation grazing in the Chicken Coulee allotment, and will continue monitoring woody riparian transects inside and outside grizzly bear exclosures at the heads of Blind Horse and Pamburn Creeks. A primary objective is to increase aspen cover from the existing 15% to 63% and willow (on station 4) from a trace to 50% inside the Pamburn exclosure, and to increase aspen from 15% to 63% inside the Blind Horse exclosure. Daubenmire transects will be established inside each exclosure to monitor trend in bear food production.

The only legal access to any ONA from the east is where the Teton River county road adjoins the Ear Mountain ONA. Consequently, any regulated harvest of game has been at the discretion of the adjoining landowner; or by outfitters or others equipped with horses and willing to take the arduous trip necessary to reach the ONAs from the USFS-administered land on the west.

Administrative vehicle use has been allowed on a limited basis, with the greatest use on the Blind Horse ONA. Refer to Administrative Access, in this and the Preferred Plan descriptions for more information.

No restrictions have been made on overnight camping in the ONAs. The level of use has not been determined, but is thought to be very low and does not occur during the most important seasons for wildlife.

RECREATION

The visual resource management (VRM) rating for the ONAs is Class II. This was determined from analysis in the HRMP. This class applies to areas where the objective is to design proposed projects to retain the existing character of the landscape.

The ROS classes for the ONAs currently consist of two categories: (1) semi-primitive non-motorized; and (2) semi-primitive motorized. This means that the ONAs are characterized by a predominately natural or natural-appearing environment. The interaction between users is low, but there is often evidence of the various users on the ONAs at the same time. The areas are managed in such a way that minimum on-site, subtle controls and restrictions are evident. The key difference between the two ROS classes is that administrative motorized use is permitted in one and not in the other.

A closed-to-all-ORVs designation is in effect for the ONAs. The ONAs are special management areas where ORV use is prohibited as outlined in the HRMP.

There are no restrictions for overnight camping or day-use within the ONAs. Existing data indicates a very low level of visitor use for the areas. The Ear Mountain trailhead along the Teton River country road will be off-limits to overnight camping.

No recreational development or facilities currently exist in the ONAs. A 12.75-acre site adjacent to the Ear Mountain ONA has been designated for multiple-use, which includes a parking area.

The existing internal network of trails provides for horseback and hiking activities.

Two signs identify the Ear Mountain and Blind Horse ONAs. Additional boundary signs, identifying Chute Mountain and Deep Creek-Battle Creek ONAs plus the identification of designated routes and applicable restrictions, will be provided.

RANGE-LIVESTOCK

BLIND HORSE ONA

Chicken Coulee Allotment

The Chicken Coulee allotment is the largest allotment in the Blind Horse ONA (see Table 3) and is the only allotment with an existing implemented allotment management plan (AMP). A cooperative management plan was agreed to by the BLM, Lewis and Clark National Forest and the Teton County Soil Conservation Service in 1974. The plan consists of a rest-rotation grazing system (see Table 4) using three pastures consisting of primarily BLM and USFS lands. An additional private pasture belonging to Everett Newman was added to the plan later (see Figure 6 in Appendix 2).

TABLE 3

BLIND HORSE ONA ALLOTMENTS

	Chicken Coulee 6303	Cowtrack 6306	Rinker Creek 6301
Operator	Everett Newman	Charles Blixrud	Unleased
Acres — BLM	3340	360	680
AUMs — BLM	279	36	Unobligated
Livestock	232 cattle	10 horses	None
Season of Use	07/01-09/20	06/01-06/30; 09/01-11/30	None
Grazing Management Category	(I) Improve	(M) Maintain	(M) Maintain

TABLE 4

CHICKEN COULEE PASTURE GRAZING SCHEDULE

	Period of Treatment — 1 cycle			
Pasture	1988	1989	1990	1991
Middle	07/01-07/28	08/02-08/30	09/01-09/20	REST
North	07/29-08/27	08/31-09/20	REST	07/01-07/31
Frenchy	08/28-09/20	REST	07/1-07/31	08/01-08/28
South	REST	07/01-08/01	08/01-08/31	08/29-09/30

Range improvements such as spring developments, pipelines and fencing were developed over a 13-year period (see Table 5).

TABLE 5

CHICKEN COULEE RANGE IMPROVEMENTS (BLM)

Project No.	Project Name	Size	Year Completed
A115	Newman Spring Development	5 gpm	1984
A115	Newman Water Pipeline	0.5 mile	1984
A122	Clark Spring	5 gpm	1974 & 1986
A122	Clark	0.8 mile	1986
A321	Chicken Fence	0.9 mile	1976
A322	Chicken Coulee Enclosure	1-2 acres	1970
No Record	North Frenchy Pasture Boundary	0.7 mile	pre-plan
A310	Cowtrack North Line Fence	0.8 mile	1967

The Chicken Coulee Allotment was designated as an Improve (I) management category because of the large amount of public land and its high potential for management under an intensive rotation grazing method. Wildlife habitat values are high for grizzly bear, bighorn sheep, Rocky Mountain goat, mule deer and elk. The high potential for improving these habitats was a prime factor in assigning an I category.

Management Objectives: USFS and BLM evaluations of the Chicken Coulee allotment show that the management objectives are being met (see Table 6) and that there is further potential for improvement if the plan is continued over several grazing cycles.

Table 6 summarizes, by percent, the amount of each objective that has been achieved.

TABLE 6

OBJECTIVE EVALUATION SUMMARY

Objective	Objectives Met	Percentage Achieved	Measured by
1	Yes	66%	Soil Condition Index (2 of 3 are upward)
2	Yes	66%	Vegetation Condition Index (Density and vigor are up on 2 of 3)
3	Yes	100%	All pastures read higher than fair condition
4	Yes		
5	Yes	90%	Utilization studies show slight to moderate use over greater than 90% of the allotment.

The allotment objectives as written in the 1974 allotment plan are to:

Improve the vigor and density of all species of vegetation which will in turn increase soil stabilization, soil fertility, and water infiltration for improved watershed protection.

Improve the vigor, reproduction, and forage production of key species, rough fescue, bluebunch wheatgrass, and Idaho fescue, for balanced livestock production and wildlife populations.

Improve all primary range in fair or lower condition class to good condition.

Improve aspen/perennial forb and upland rough fescue/Idaho fescue habitat types that are in unsatisfactory condition. Note: Riparian habitats are being monitored, see Wildlife Resources for discussion.

Improve the overall distribution of livestock and the utilization by livestock.

Additional objectives as outlined in Appendix E, of the Final Headwaters RMP, p. 185 are:

Rinker Creek Tract

The 680-acre Rinker Creek tract on the north end of Blind Horse ONA is classified as a non-leased tract (see Final Headwaters RMP, p. 20, Table 2-1). The tract is reserved for grizzly bear habitat protection and is identified indefinitely as non-leaseable for grazing.

Pamburn Tract

The Pamburn tract (192.25 acres) is an unfenced tract lying between the Cowtrack allotment and the ungrazed Lewis and Clark National Forest. The vegetation is reserved for bighorn sheep and has been excluded from grazing since May 22, 1975, by District Manager's decision. No allotment categorization was made for this tract. A natural rock escarpment barrier divides this tract from the horse-grazed Cowtrack allotment.

Cowtrack Allotment

The Cowtrack allotment is 360 acres on the southern end of the Blind Horse ONA. Although the Cowtrack allotment is leased for horse grazing during June, September and October, the tract is primary winter range for mule deer and big horn sheep. Management of this tract has consisted of maximizing the amount of residual browse and bunchgrass vegetation for winter and spring wildlife habitat (November—May). Livestock water has not been developed to prevent heavy grazing on this winter—spring habitat.

No rangeland projects are proposed.

Management Objectives: The objective of minimal development and custodial management is to maintain the existing (M-maintenance category) high value wildlife habitat. If wildlife habitat carrying capacity cannot be maintained, the lease will be reduced to alternate-year grazing or the federal land will be protected from grazing by boundary fencing.

EAR MOUNTAIN ONA

McCarthy Individual Allotment

The McCarthy allotment is one of two allotments (see Table 7) in the Ear Mountain ONA. Approximately 864 federal acres, located south of these allotments are unleased for grazing following guidance provided in the HRMP.

TABLE 7

EAR MOUNTAIN ONA ALLOTMENT SUMMARY

Allotment	Operator	Public Acres	Number Livestock	Season	Public AUMs	Management Category
Ear Mtn.	The Nature Conservancy	945	15 horses	July 5-Sept. 5	39	M
Robert McCarthy	McCarthy	60	4 horses	May 1-June 1 Oct. 1-Oct. 15	6	C

The McCarthy individual allotment borders the Teton River county road on the north. The federal land includes some non-riparian benchland adjacent to the McCarthy private land. This small public land tract is mostly very steep, rocky and partially bordered by natural rock barrier.

Developments include one fence on federal land (1/2-mile) which was started in 1987 and is scheduled for completion in 1988. The fence is to separate the private benchland pasture from the federal land to control the season and amount of grazing use.

The allotment was assigned a Custodial (C) category because of the very small size and no intensive management possibilities.

Ear Mountain Allotment

The Ear Mountain allotment is adjacent to, but south of the McCarthy Individual allotment. The federal land is represented by mixed conifer forest and grassland at elevations between 5,100 to 6,000 feet. The maximum livestock carrying capacity is estimated at 78 AUMs. No ecological site inventory on the Ear Mountain allotment (addition) exists. The allotment has been grazed by about 15 horses during the summer (July—September), but has not been grazed to its full capacity since the parcel became federal land after its purchase from The Nature Conservancy in 1985.

One-half mile of fence on the northeast corner of the allotment is the only range improvement project. The south boundary (1¼ mile) is fenced along the Blackleaf Wildlife Management Area.

The allotment was assigned a Maintain (M) category because of small size and low intensive (rotation) management potential.

Ear Mountain Tract

The Ear Mountain tract is unleased for grazing and represents 550.2 acres of land unsuitable for livestock surrounding and including Ear Mountain Peak. This tract was reserved by District Manager's decision (November 4, 1977) for habitat for threatened and endangered species protection and bighorn sheep, mountain goat, and mule deer winter/spring habitat (see Table 1 for legal description, and Figure 6 in Appendix 2).

CHUTE MOUNTAIN ONA

East Front Allotment

The Chute Mountain ONA is presently leased by John Salmond as summer pasture from June 15—October 15. There are no fences separating the ONA lands from Salmond's private lands. The entire summer pasture is used by about 500 cattle. The private lands along the South Fork of Willow Creek are used for hayland after cattle are moved to higher elevations in June or early July. Approximately two-thirds of the Chute Mountain ONA lands are classified as unsuitable for livestock grazing and therefore have no carrying capacity. Heavy timber and steep slopes (over 25%) or lack of forage were reasons given for unsuitability.

There are no range improvements on the ONA.

DEEP CREEK-BATTLE CREEK ONA

East Front Allotment

The East Front allotment includes all BLM-administered land north of the Green Timber allotment in this ONA (see Figure 9 in Appendix 2). The allotment contains about 2,488 federal acres with a livestock capacity of 250 AUMs. Approximately 600-800 head of cattle are presently grazed in this summer pasture from June 15th—October 15th. In 1985 the operator, John Salmond, was issued a Proposed Decision which reduces the federal land capacity from 305 AUMs to 250 AUMs over a 5-year period ending 1990.

There are no range improvements on the federal lands in this allotment. Federal and private lands are grazed concurrently. Private lands on the east side are fenced, while a rock escarpment on the Lewis and Clark National Forest is the west boundary. Most of the federal lands are classified as unsuitable for livestock, and carrying capacities apply only to the suitable portions of the allotment. The majority of the private land is suitable for grazing and grazing capacities are higher because of better and deeper soil and moisture conditions.

The East Front allotment is categorized in the HRMP as an Improve (I) category allotment because of the need to improve rangeland condition and the high value for mule deer, bighorn sheep, elk, grizzly bear and Rocky Mountain goat habitat. Under the No Action Plan the category will change to (C) custodial because of the lost opportunity to improve range conditions and resolve livestock conflicts.

Green Timber Allotment

The Green Timber allotment is located on the southern most area of this ONA. The federal grazing allotment has a total of 727 BLM-administered acres, 305 of which are suitable for livestock grazing. The federal lands are mostly heavy timbered conifer forests on steep slopes with a few interspersed, high elevation (6,000 feet) mountain meadows. There are 1,800 acres of private land, operated by James Boadle, and 240 acres of State of Montana land controlled by the operator. The public lands are not separated from the lower elevation private lands by fencing, but are grazed less than the private and state lands because of slope restrictions. Cattle (170 head) are turned into the allotment in July to graze the private and state lands first and graze the higher elevations (federal land) later when additional feed is required. This unreliable method of livestock movement creates over-utilization and poor distribution of livestock.

The original carrying capacity of 180 AUMs established before 1980, was over estimated, and in 1985, the operator (James Boadle) was issued a Proposed Decision reducing the capacity of the suitable acreage to 25 active AUMs over a 5-year period ending in 1990.

The HRMP tentatively classified the Green Timber allotment (Sun River) in a Maintain (M) category, but was recategorized after field checks to an Improve (I) category because of the allotment's moderate to high importance along the RMF for mule deer and bighorn sheep. Under the No Action Plan the category will change to custodial (C) because of the lost opportunity to improve range conditions and resolve livestock conflicts.

This allotment has no range improvement developments. Springs are located on federal land but are inaccessible for development. Most opportunities for management occur on private land.

CULTURAL AND HISTORIC

A cultural resource inventory will be required in advance of all surface disturbing activities and any identified sites will be recorded, evaluated, avoided or mitigated in accordance with regulations and BLM policies. However, few projects will occur under this plan, so little inventory will be required.

AIR QUALITY

The No Action Plan will allow particulate matter to increase to maximum levels allowable for Class II airsheds (see Table 8). Dust abatement and traffic control may or may not be required.

TABLE 8

MAXIMUM ALLOWABLE INCREMENTS OF DETERIORATION
Measured in Micrograms Per Cubic Meter

Pollutants	Class I	Class II
Particulate Matter		
Annual Geometric Mean	5	19
24-hr. Maximum	10	37
Sulphur Dioxide		
Annual Arithmetic Mean	2	20
24-hr. Maximum *	5	91
3-hr. Maximum*	25	512

*Maximum allowable increment may be exceeded once per year at any receptor station.

Source: Clean Air Act Amendments of 1977

Prescribed burns will continue to be done in accordance with the Montana State Airshed Coordinator.

OIL-GAS AND MINERALS

OIL-GAS

New oil and gas leases will be reviewed and issued in the outer "No Surface Occupancy" (NSO) areas of the ONAs. Leases inside the 1/4-mile boundary that expire will not be reoffered.

Currently, only the Blind Horse ONA has valid leases, held by production from the Blackleaf Unit or suspended, inside the 1/4-mile boundary.

Table 9 presents the acreage leased in each ONA.

TABLE 9

CURRENT OIL AND GAS LEASE SITUATION

	Blindhorse	Ear Mountain	Chute Mountain	Deep Creek / Battle Creek
Total Acres	4,927	1,869	3,205	3,086
Acres Currently Leased	4,927	360	1,305	797

Valid existing rights within the Blind Horse ONA allow for road and pipeline construction within the ONA for the operator to explore and develop a lease. Oil and gas pipelines and related powerlines will be routed to avoid crossing the ONAs except in instances where the route chosen to avoid crossing the ONA would cause greater impacts than crossing the subject ONA.

SEISMIC EXPLORATION

Seismic notices are reviewed and stipulations from the RMF Guidelines and the HRMP are applied. Under this alternative, cross-country seismic exploration with motorized vehicles may be allowed on existing roads and trails, at the discretion of the authorized officer as outlined in 43 CFR8340.0-5(a)3. Seismic exploration (foot travel, helicopters, backpacks) is allowed throughout the ONAs. No new road construction will be authorized.

COAL

There is no known coal resource within the ONAs.

MINERALS—LOCATABLE

Public lands within the ONAs will remain open to mineral entry based on the HRMP. There are no existing mining claims within the ONAs. Should a claim be staked, a Plan of Operations would be required on all activities (43 CFR 3809.1-4(b)3), except casual use, as defined in 43 CFR 3809.1-2. "Casual use operations are those that cause negligible surface disturbance and that do not use explosives, mechanized earthmoving equipment, or off-road vehicles in areas closed to ORV use. The operator is not required to contact the BLM prior to or after conducting casual use operations, but must take all steps necessary to prevent unnecessary or undue degradation." "Operations" includes all activity associated with exploration, assessment work, development and processing of mineral deposits located under the mining laws.

Bonding will be required for all operations, except casual use to ensure adequate rehabilitation. Disturbed site rehabilitation will consider replacement of wildlife habitat.

Timing restrictions may be applied to mining operations on a case-by-case basis to prevent unnecessary and undue degradation, while protecting important wildlife habitat.

Mine developments in crucial wildlife habitats may have to be done in stages. This would require the operator to rehabilitate previously disturbed areas prior to initiating new surface disturbing activities. This action would enhance the ability of mining operations to continue while rehabilitating critical wildlife habitat at the earliest possible opportunity.

MINERALS—SALEABLE

Removal of common variety saleable minerals (e.g. sand, gravel, rock) will be reviewed on an individual basis utilizing the RMF Guidelines and the HRMP.

LANDS—ACCESS

Access acquisition under this plan is "as opportunity arises."

WATERSHED

The No Action Plan would allow increases in livestock allocations in accordance with the HRMP. Increases in vegetation would not necessarily go to watershed and wildlife.

SOILS

The No Action Plan will allow continued livestock grazing at the present level. Trampling of soil and vegetation in riparian areas and adjacent slopes may result in severe soil erosion, water quality reduction, and reduced vegetation ground cover.

NOXIOUS PLANTS

The No Action Plan may allow the continued threat of rapid spread of noxious plants in ONAs. This could result in reduced native vegetation as food and cover for wildlife, livestock grazing, watershed stability, natural aesthetics, and impose an economic loss to downstream private landowners as noxious plants are spread downslope by wind, water, animal movements and vehicles.

The No Action Plan may not adequately conform to federal, state, or county noxious weed control laws and regulations. However, according to public law 90-583 (Carlson-Foley Act) the BLM must and will provide for the control of noxious plants on federal land under BLM administration. Other legislation requiring BLM action on noxious plants includes the: Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1967 (FLPMA) (PL 94-579); the Public Rangelands Improvement Act of 1978 (PRIA); and the Montana County Noxious Weed Management Act (Effective: 10-1-85).

FIRE

The 1978 Lewistown District Fire Management plan would remain in effect. No specific stipulations relative to the ONAs were made in that plan, and the U.S. Forest Service would continue to be responsible for fire control in the ONAs.

ADMINISTRATIVE ACCESS

The ONAs are closed to all forms of motorized vehicles. However, administrative vehicular access will be allowed agency personnel for project and range allotment monitoring, and resource use evaluations. This administrative access is restricted to existing roads and trails only.

Livestock permittees will be allowed administrative access on a permit basis to administer their livestock lease (including but not limited to spring, fence, and pipeline maintenance, salt dispersal, livestock inspection and veterinarian care). This access is limited to existing roads/trails only and is subject to any stipulations imposed by the agency. Cross-country travel will not be authorized.

Seismic activity conducted by ground-traveling motorized vehicles will be allowed access on a permitted basis, limited to existing roads/trails, and subject to stipulations imposed by the agency. Cross-country motorized travel for seismic exploration may be permitted at the discretion of the authorized officer as outlined in 43 CFR 8340.0-5(a)3.

This Activity Plan will be amended to reflect a more restrictive motorized administrative access policy should monitoring indicate this form of access is negatively impacting the ONA values.

PREFERRED ACTIVITY PLAN

WILDLIFE AND FISHERIES

The RMF is a nationally significant wildlife area recognized for the large numbers of important game species it supports as well as for the critical habitats it provides. Numerous wildlife studies have been undertaken on the RMF, many as a result of the Interagency Rocky Mountain Front Monitoring and Evaluation Program which was initiated in 1980. The summarized data collected and wildlife management guidelines developed were recently published (Rocky Mountain Front Task Force, 1987).

Sound wildlife habitat management along the RMF is the key to maintaining populations of over 3,500 elk, 10,000 mule deer plus smaller populations of whitetailed deer, 1,200 bighorn sheep, and 100 Rocky Mountain goats. Some of these animals use the RMF as year-round habitat, while many are migratory from as far as the Bob Marshall Wilderness and depend on the RMF for winter range. All of these species are a prey base for the endangered gray wolf and the RMF is "designated recovery habitat." The RMF is home to one of the few remaining populations of the threatened grizzly bear (estimated at 90 individuals).

BLM's most important contribution to the security and continued welfare of RMF wildlife is closely tied to the management of the ONAs. Wildlife dependent at least seasonally on these ONAs are shown in Table 15 of Appendix 4. These values have been thoroughly discussed in the HRMP, the Ear Mountain ONA Addition Plan Amendment/EA, and the RMF Task Force Wildlife Guidelines.

A draft Rocky Mountain Front Wildlife Habitat Management Plan (HMP) (Elliot, W.E., 1980) intended for implementation in fiscal year 1981, was never approved, however, some of the wildlife improvement projects listed have been completed and some of the issues have been resolved and wildlife conditions improved. That draft wildlife habitat management plan was superceded by initiation and completion of the HRMP. However, the HMP did identify issues that could be resolved during the RMP process.

The ONAs in question comprise approximately 75% of BLM's public land surface along the RMF, and are where BLM can most effectively manage wildlife and other natural resources.

Livestock grazing systems (especially the East Front allotment) will be actively and intensively managed to improve important wildlife habitats. The grazing management program for each allotment is described in the Range section of this plan description). If substantial improvement in vegetation trend is not apparent within two grazing cycles after AMP implementation, grazing system modification would be made to improve important wildlife habitats, even to the point of excluding cattle by fencing those habitats or water sources that attract livestock. Efforts would be made to design livestock grazing systems to preclude such drastic measures.

Intensive grazing management would continue in the Chicken Coulee allotment. The grazing management program for this allotment is described in the Range section of this plan description. BLM would monitor grizzly bear exclosures as explained in the No Action Plan.

Access to eastern boundaries of all ONAs would be established to allow walk-in (horses, pedestrian, and non-motorized mountain bikes) hunting so that proper game management could occur (regulated harvest) and so the general public could use the wildlife resource.

Seismic exploration would be allowed in ONAs with strict adherence to the RMF Wildlife Guidelines. BLM would require operators to be especially careful with the use of helicopters (i.e., flight paths, above-ground heights, and 9-mile spacing).

Monitoring of wildlife and range studies and trapping and transplanting of game species would be permitted as described in the Administrative Access section of this plan. Temporary trap facilities would be allowed. Vehicles may be used if necessary for control actions of grizzly bear and gray wolf according to Interagency Agreements within Grizzly Bear and Gray Wolf Recovery Plan goals. Control may include the use of aircraft, i.e. helicopters.

Camping in ONAs would be allowed during any season of the year, but monitored to determine if levels of overnight use would be high enough to develop wildlife problems (e.g., spring grizzly bear habitats or ungulate winter range). If camping levels would become detrimental, BLM would reassess policy and restrict camping by season until consequences are acceptable.

An abstract (draft) of the Section 7 consultation process with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Office of Endangered Species, and the general approach to completing The Biological Evaluation/Consultation for the Preferred Plan, per the Endangered Species Act is presented in the Appendix 5.

RECREATION

The visual resource management rating for the ONAs would be upgraded to Class I, except for trailhead sites which would remain Class II. This rating can be assigned to all special areas where the current management situations require maintaining a natural environment essentially unaltered by man. These ONAs possess an "A" scenic quality for all three distance zones and have high visual sensitivity levels.

The VRM Class I applies to areas where the objective is to maintain a landscape setting that appears unaltered by man. The Class I definition was presented in the No Action Plan.

The recreation opportunity spectrum (ROS) classes for the ONAs consists of three categories; semi-primitive non-motorized, semi-primitive motorized, and roaded natural, with the latter being less restrictive. All trailheads would be delineated as "roaded natural."

The HRMP provided the general guidance for ORV management and designations for the ONAs. This AP will provide the specific guidelines and restrictions needed to implement the ORV closure. Refer to Figures 10-13, in Appendix 6 for ORV designation maps for each ONA. The use of ORVs in closed areas would be allowed for administrative reasons, but this use would be made only with the approval of the Great Falls Resource Area Manager on an individual basis. This motorized administrative use would be restricted to designated routes within the ONAs and includes government employees, livestock permittees, seismic crews, emergency personnel, and state wildlife personnel. No cross-country travel would be permissible.

Camping would be allowed throughout the ONAs, with the exception of the Ear Mountain Trailhead. Camping restrictions on future trailhead sites would be determined on an individual basis after the access is acquired. The ONA would be monitored to see if any conflicts surface between wildlife and campers. If the levels of camping use become high enough to create a problem, seasonal restrictions would be applied. The public should avoid locating campsites in areas that contain delicate plants. They should also select campsites that are well away from streams and trails. If campfires are needed, campers should use fire rings already in place. Use of the "no trace" fire technique will be required in isolated and less popular areas of the ONAs where there are no fire rings.

Recreational camping would be restricted within 200 feet of all springs to protect the water source and to permit wildlife use.

The following recreational development and facilities have been proposed for the ONAs:

ONA boundaries and trailheads would be signed to inform the public of avoidance areas, ORV regulations, noxious plant control efforts, and other essential informational assistance.

The Blind Horse ONA would require a minimum of one trailhead. A unisex toilet would be placed here (VRM Class II restrictions). Recreationists would be required to implement a pack-in/pack-out refuse policy. Picnic tables and fire rings would be provided to accommodate day-use. Trails for hiking, horseback, and mountain bikes may be constructed or maintained and would conform to VRM Class I guidelines.

The Ear Mountain ONA would require a minimum of one trailhead with a 2-acre gravel surface parking area. Two toilets would be placed here. Users would be required to implement a pack-in/pack-out garbage policy. A picnic table, fire rings, and drinking water, if feasible, would be provided to accommodate day-use only. Boundaries and trailheads would be signed. Trails for hiking, horseback and mountain bikes would be provided but must conform to VRM I visual restrictions. BLM would work with USFS on possible trail routes.

The Chute Mountain ONA would require a minimum of one trailhead with a 1-acre gravel surface parking lot. No toilet will be placed here and the garbage policy will be pack-in/pack-out. The area would provide day-use facilities such as tables and fire rings. Trails would conform to VRM Class I guidelines for hiking and horseback.

The Deep Creek-Battle Creek ONA would require a minimum of one trailhead with a 1-2-acre gravel surface parking lot, one unisex toilet, a bear-proof garbage container and picnic tables, fire rings, and drinking water, if feasible, would be provided to accommodate overnight camping. Boundary signs would be placed at strategic locations where people would be expected to enter the area. Trails for hiking and horseback use would be maintained or constructed, conforming to VRM Class I guidelines.

RANGE-LIVESTOCK

BLIND HORSE ONA

Chicken Coulee Allotment

The range management developments in this allotment have been developed over the previous 13 years. The rangeland has shown stabilized (good or better) vegetation and soil conditions. Wildlife habitat for mule deer, elk, bighorn sheep and grizzly bear has benefited from the rest-rotation, improved livestock distribution, spring and riparian protection by exclosures and from better range resources and watershed conditions. Most of the objectives (see Final Headwaters RMP, p. 185) set forth by the cooperative allotment management plan (USFS, BLM, Montana State and private) have been met or partially met. There is the potential to improve rangeland and wildlife habitat conditions under the present plan where studies show an upward trend. The Preferred Activity Plan would continue the present grazing plan in order to reach the full potential of the allotment. Range development that would improve all resource objectives, does not deteriorate wildlife habitat goals, or impair the natural area visual character is preferred in this plan.

The generic type of range developments depicted in Table 10 could be proposed.

TABLE 10

PROPOSED RANGE DEVELOPMENTS — CHICKEN COULEE ALLOTMENT

Project	Size	Cost	Purpose
Prescribe Burn	100 acres per pasture	$2-4/acre	Reduce shrubby cinquefoil pasture invasion and provide succulent grasses in under utilized areas for mule deer, elk, bighorn sheep, mountain goats and livestock.
Water Spring Development (1)	5 gal. per minute	$500	To distribute livestock utilization, prevent overgrazing and protect riparian habitats.
Water Tank and Pipeline	0.5 mile	$1,500	To distribute livestock utilization, prevent overgrazing and protect riparian habitats.
Integrated Pest Management	Treat with biological or herbicides as needed. No known pests at present.	$50 per acre (herbicide)	To reduce noxious plant infestation.

Management Objectives

The Preferred Plan objectives would remain the same as those in the No Action Plan, but with some rewording and more measureable goals.

Rewrite Objective 1

Maintain or improve the vigor and density of all species of vegetation which will in turn increase soil stabilization, soil fertility, and water infiltration for improved watershed protection. Measureable objectives:

South Pasture—Maintain Index 90 Excellent Condition (or maintain BLM SSF of 1-20, Stable).

Middle Pasture—Improve Index 73 Good to 81 Excellent in three grazing cycles (or BLM SSF from Moderate 41-60 to Stable 1-20).

North Pasture — Maintain Index 89 Excellent (BLM SSF of 1-20, Stable).

Rewrite Objective 2

Improve the vigor, reproduction, and forage production of key species, rough fescue and Idaho fescue for balanced livestock production and wildlife habitat requirements. Measureable objectives:

South Pasture— Maintain 12% Fe Id. Maintain 16% Fe Sc.

Middle Pasture — Maintain 25% Fe Id. Increase 3% Fe Sc to 10% in three cycles.

North Pasture — Maintain 15% Fe Id. Increase 6% Fe Sc to 12% in three cycles.

Rewrite Objective 3

Maintain all primary range in good or better condition (USDA Index 15 and above; BLM Index 51-100).

Rewrite Objective 4

Riparian enhancement is addressed in the Wildlife and Fisheries section of this plan description.

Rewrite Objective 5

Maintain slight to moderate utilization over 90% of the suitable rangeland.

Cowtrack Allotment

There is little opportunity for intensive allotment development or grazing systems on this small tract. The Preferred Plan would be to graze, as the current situation, for a brief period in late spring (6/01-6/30), rest during the summer, and graze again in the fall (9/01-11/30).

Management Objectives

Maintain range condition and wildlife habitat condition (Index 51 or above indefinitely).

Livestock use should not exceed 50% (slight to moderate) over 90% of the suitable livestock range in order to maintain the winter wildlife habitat.

If wildlife winter range carrying capacity cannot be maintained as outlined in the objectives, then a proposal will be made to graze livestock only in alternate years or the federal land would be protected completely from livestock grazing by fencing the federal land boundary. This proposal should be determined by 1993, or in 5 years to take in consideration and average the abnormal weather and drought years which influence monitoring.

EAR MOUNTAIN ONA

McCarthy Individual Allotment

The McCarthy allotment will continue to be managed as a custodial allotment as in the current situation.

No additional range developments will be proposed (see objectives).

Management Objectives

Objectives of custodial management would be to graze light to moderate (below 60% utilization) and to prevent or control noxious plant infestation. Integrated Pest Management (IPM) use with biological agents (insects) would be used in the Teton River bottom. Herbicides may be used to prevent short-term spreading of spotted knapweed.

Ear Mountain Allotment

The Ear Mountain allotment would remain in the Maintain category. The most cost effective proposal to maintain or improve the resources is to continue the current situation management in consideration of the allotments mostly good or better range condition and low impact level of horse or grazing use and season.

No range improvements are proposed. Water and fencing are adequate to meet the objectives.

Management Objectives

There is a lack of range resource data necessary to propose accurate and measureable objectives. In general terms, the objectives proposed are to:

Maintain or improve the good condition (Index 51 Ecological Site Method) range. Improve the fair condition range (Index 21-50) to good or excellent in 10 years.

Inventory the rangeland with the "ecological site method" to provide baseline data and begin monitoring transects by 1990.

Ear Mountain Tract

The Ear Mountain tract is unleased for grazing and represents 550.2 acres of unsuitable lands surrounding and including Ear Mountain Peak. This tract is reserved by District Manager's decision (November 4, 1977) for land and forage needed for threatened and endangered species protection and bighorn sheep, mountain goat, and mule deer winter/spring forage (see Table 2 for the legal description, and Appendix 2, Figure 7).

CHUTE MOUNTAIN ONA

East Front Allotment

One of the three preliminary pastures outlined in the Deep Creek-Battle Creek ONA for the East Front allotment is in the Chute Mountain ONA. This north pasture would be called Edwards Creek pasture and would be established after the 2½-mile federal land boundary line is fenced. The pasture would be totally BLM-administered with the Lewis and Clark National Forest as a boundary on the west. The narrative on carrying capacity, resources, Activity Plan objectives, monitoring and proposed range improvements is given in the following allotment discussion.

DEEP CREEK-BATTLE CREEK ONA

East Front Allotment

This allotment has high potential to respond to livestock management. As noted in Appendix E of the Final Headwaters RMP (p. 185), forage utilization by livestock is poorly distributed, resulting in over-utilization and poor range conditions in some areas. There is opportunity to improve riparian habitat for wildlife, spring-winter mule deer and sheep range and to improve watershed conditions. All of these objectives can be met, if the vegetation on at least parts of the federal lands is allowed to reach full maturity or seed ripe each year. The best method to accomplish this is to fence across (east-west) the ONA to make pastures manageable so that one or more pastures are not grazed during the spring period (no grazing June 15-July 15). The result of this treatment would be improved plant condition, vigor and reproductiveness. Livestock, wildlife, and watershed conditions would improve because spring plant rest is beneficial to all the vegetation that those resources depend on.

A three-pasture, deferred-rotation grazing system would be used to accomplish the above objectives. Two pastures would be created in the Deep Creek-Battle Creek ONA while a third would be in the Chute Mountain ONA.

The reduction in federal AUMs implemented by the proposed decision may be ineffective in actually reducing livestock numbers if the livestock operator continues to graze the same number of cattle on adjacent private land. Private lands are mixed with BLM public lands in the pasture and an agreement to limit livestock numbers has not been reached. BLM would actively pursue the implementation of an AMP to resolve this issue.

The preliminary size in acres and capacity of these pastures is shown in Table 11.

TABLE 11

PASTURE ACRES/CAPACITY (AUMs)

	BLM	Private	USFS	Total
Battle Creek Pasture (South)	1,348/90	1,855/208	60/10	3,238/308
Deep Creek (Middle)*	1,140/160	3,050/408	—	4,370/568
Edwards Creek (North) (Chute Mountain ONA)	2,290/192	0	—	2,290/192
Totals	4,778/442	4,905/616	60/10	9,898/1,068

Private AUMS are based on preliminary estimates using 7-9 acre per AUM average.

*This pasture could be divided to add a fourth pasture. The size or number of pastures for the deferred-rotation system has not been determined but could include 3-4 pastures. Grazing in the early pasture would begin July 1 and end October 15. This proposed season would allow 3½ months use for 305 cattle.

Table 12 shows the proposed range developments on the East Front allotment.

TABLE 12

PROPOSED RANGE DEVELOPMENTS — EAST FRONT ALLOTMENT

Project	Size	Cost Estimate	Purpose
Fencing (4-wire, steel post & wood jackleg)	4 miles BLM 2.0 miles Private	$10,000 $5,000	To distribute livestock, control season of use.
Spring Development	5 gal. per min.	$2,000	Distribute livestock, prevent overgrazing, protect riparian habitat.
Water, tanks, & pipelines	1.5 miles, 6 tanks	$3,000	Distribute livestock, prevent overgrazing, protect riparian habitat.
Prescribe Burn	Unknown	$2-4/acre	Reduce shrubby cinquefoil, provide succulent grasses & forbs in underutilized areas for mule deer, elk, big horn sheep, goats and livestock.
Integrated Pest Management	Treat with biological or chemical as need occurs-none known at present.	$50/acre (herbicide)	To reduce noxious plant infestation.

Management Objectives

Improve the range condition from poor (Index 23.6) to good (Index 51) or better as read on transect 2001 in 15 years. Establish a transect and similar objectives for the south (Battle Creek) pasture.

Improve the soil stability and watershed condition by monitoring the Soil Surface Factors (SSF) by range sites within each pasture and to reduce SSF to 20 or less (slight to stable) in 10 years on key range sites.

Improve livestock distribution so that light to moderate utilization (20 to 50%) will occur on 30 to 90% of the allotment in 5 years.

The grazing system would be modified or cattle removed from the allotment if after two grazing cycles substantial progress in achieving the above three objectives is not made.

Green Timber Allotment

There are few opportunities in this allotment to develop range improvements or rotate livestock in a pasture system in this ONA. The management objective would be to maintain the range condition, (1980 Site-Vegetation Inventory shows good to excellent condition) the high value wildlife habitat, and watershed conditions by improving the livestock distribution. The goal would be to achieve moderate use (50%) of the federal lands after the critical spring growth period (i.e. after July).

The preferred method with the least cost, would be to graze the federal lands after July 1, with approximately 35 cattle for a 3-week period. To accomplish this the operator would herd 35 cattle by horse after July 1 for 3 weeks. The operators could pick a later 3-week period (i.e., late July to August, or August to September), but would not use the federal land before July 1, or after October 15. The operator would be required to remove the cattle from the federal land pasture after the 3-week period to avoid using more than 50% of the available forage.

No range improvements would be proposed. Integrated Pest Management (IPM) using herbicides and biological agents would be used to control noxious plants infestations such as spotted knapweed. Spotted knapweed has not been found on the Green Timber allotment federal lands at this time.

Most of the opportunities for improved management occur on private land and thus reduce BLM's opportunity to invest in rangeland improvements. The alternatives for allotment management planning are limited for this reason.

Management Objectives

Maintain or improve the range condition in good (Index 51) or better condition and to establish a permanent transect to monitor this objective.

Maintain or improve the stable to slight soil surface factor at an Index of 20 or less.

Obtain livestock forage utilization that is moderate (50-60%) on the key range sites.

CULTURAL AND HISTORIC

No major issues directly apply to cultural resource management in the ONAs. However, the issues of public access, seismic exploration, range improvements, and recreation developments may indirectly affect archeological (and rarely historical) sites through surface disturbing activities such as roads, seismic lines, spring developments, parking facilities and hiking trails.

Caution should be used in planning major surface disturbing projects (road or parking facility) in the canyons and stream bottoms, especially at the point where they emerge from steep terrain. These sensitive areas include Battle Creek and the South Fork of Deep Creek in the Deep Creek-Battle Creek ONA, the North Fork of Deep Creek in the Chute Mountain ONA, the North and South Forks of Willow Creek in the Ear Mountain ONA, and the two forks of Muddy Creek in the Blind Horse ONA. Several of these areas would undoubtedly contain prehistoric aboriginal campsites which may be eligible for the National Register. Minor projects, such as spring developments, hiking trails, and seismic lines could normally be planned to avoid cultural resources in these areas. The summits of Ear Mountain, Chute Mountain and lesser prominences, including escarpments, should be avoided by all projects if an inventory reveals that a prehistoric or historical aboriginal religious site (vision quest structure) is present.

Cultural resource inventories would be conducted prior to approving a surface disturbing project. Identified sites would be recorded and evaluated in consultation with the Montana State Historical Preservation Office (SHPO). If determined to be eligible for the National Register, they would be avoided or mitigated (salvaged).

AIR QUALITY

The four ONAs are in a Class II airshed, defined as moderately impacted by pollutants, and are bordered on the west by a mandatory Class I area (the Bob Marshall Wilderness).

Projects contributing to a decline in air quality would require more stringent stipulations. Oil and gas production facilities adjacent to the ONAs may require vapor recovery units to contain noxious gases, such as those associated with hydrogen sulfide.

Prescribed burns may degrade air quality. Pollutants produced by this action are expected to be dispersed by the strong winds in the area, and all burns would be coordinated with the State Airshed Coordinator.

Projects contributing to a decline in air quality would require more stringent stipulations. The State of Montana, Air Quality Bureau, standard for ambient H_2S level is .05 parts per million (ppm) per hour, not to be exceeded more than once per year. The standard for ambient SO_2 level is .10 ppm per 24-hour average, not to be exceeded more than once per year. The BLM agrees that this is a reasonable threshold value for noxious odor control in the vicinity of the RMF ONAs. Present ambient concentrations in the vicinity of existing production facilities are well within these thresholds. Oil and gas companies proposing production facilities would be required to submit a plan to meet these threshold values.

There are several oil-gas leases held by production, or suspended within the Blind Horse ONA. Should any development occur on these leases, venting and flaring of the wells would not be allowed if not economically justified or if in violation of state or federal air quality standards.

Intense dust abatement (daily road watering, use of resin road surfaces, etc.) on road surfaces and traffic control requirements would be required to minimize particulate matter in the air.

OIL-GAS AND MINERALS

OIL-GAS

Oil and gas leasing would continue as indicated in the HRMP. Leases that expire that are greater than 1/4-mile inside the NSO boundary as shown in the HRMP would not be reoffered. Those leases that are 1/4-mile or less inside the NSO boundary would be reviewed and reoffered with NSO stipulations (refer to Table 13 and Appendix 3, Figures 14-21).

TABLE 13

PREFERRED ACTION PLAN OIL AND GAS DEVELOPMENT

	Blind Horse	Ear Mountain	Chute Mountain	Deep Creek/ Battle Creek
Total Acres	4,937	1,869	3,205	3,086
Acres to be Leased with NSO	2,368	646	1,305	2,729
Acres not to be Leased	2,559	1,223	1,900	357

The NSO stipulation has been attached to the 1/4-mile-wide borders of the ONAs according to the HRMP. BLM could have designated all of the ONAs as NSO in consideration of resource values. However, based on the premise that oil-gas resources over 1/2-mile from a drillsite probably cannot be drained, the BLM felt it was prudent to not lease those areas greater than 1/4-mile from where a location could be constructed, thereby not leasing an area a lease holder could not develop. When the HRMP is updated or amended, there is the possibility that advances in drilling and exploration technology may allow some of the ONA No Lease portions to be leased with NSO stipulations without degrading the outstanding resources, values, and natural characteristics of the ONAs. Valid existing lease rights in the Blind Horse ONA allow for roads and pipeline construction within the ONA to allow oil and gas exploration and development. Oil and gas pipelines and related powerlines would be routed to avoid ONAs, except where the route chosen to avoid crossing other public or private land would cause more impacts.

Oil and gas activities in or adjacent to the ONAs may produce H_2S gas. The best technology practices, including an H_2S contingency plan, will be followed should gas production occur.

SEISMIC EXPLORATION

Seismic stipulations would be developed and reviewed on an individual basis utilizing the RMF Wildlife Guidelines, the HRMP and this AP.

Under this plan, motorized seismic exploration would only be allowed on designated roads and trails. No motorized, cross-country seismic exploration would be authorized. Non-motorized, seismic exploration (helicopters, backpacks) would be allowed throughout the ONAs, in compliance with the RMF Guidelines and the HRMP. No new road construction would be authorized.

COAL

There is no known coal resource within the ONAs.

MINERALS—LOCATABLE

Public lands within the ONAs would remain open to mineral entry according to the HRMP. There are no mining claims within the ONAs. Should a claim be staked, a Plan of Operations would be required on all activities (43 CFR 3809.1-4(b)3), except casual use, as defined in 43 CFR 3809.1-2. "Casual use operations are those that cause negligible surface disturbance and that do not use explosives or mechanized earthmoving equipment in areas closed to ORV use. The operator is not required to contact the BLM prior to or after conducting casual use operations, but must take all steps necessary to prevent unnecessary or undue degradation." "Operations" includes all activity associated with exploration, assessment work, development and processing of mineral deposits located under the mining laws.

To ensure adequate rehabilitation, bonding would be required on all operations, except for casual use.

Rehabilitation measures would consider replacement of wildlife food and cover.

Timing restrictions would be applied to mining operations on an individual basis to accommodate mining operations and to prevent unnecessary and undue degradation while protecting important wildlife habitat.

Mining development in crucial wildlife habitat may have to be done in stages. This would require the operator to rehabilitate previously disturbed areas prior to initiating new surface disturbing activities. This action would enhance the ability of mining operations to continue while rehabilitating critical wildlife habitat at the earliest possible opportunity.

MINERALS—SALEABLE

There would be no removal of common variety saleable minerals (sand, gravel, rock) within the ONAs.

LANDS—ACCESS

The Blind Horse ONA would require two access routes. One would be acquired by 1993, and the second by 1998.

The Ear Mountain ONA would require one additional access route. The existing route is the Teton River county road in the northeast corner of the ONA. The additional route would be into the southern portion of the ONA and would be acquired by 1998.

The Chute Mountain ONA would require two access routes. One route would be acquired by 1994, the second by 1998.

The Deep Creek-Battle Creek ONA would require three access routes. One access route would be acquired by 1993, the additional two routes by 2000.

Condemnation authority would be used when landowner negotiations fail to produce an acceptable access route.

WATERSHED

The best method to maintain or improve water quality and quantity is to improve vegetative cover. Vegetative cover could be improved in several areas throughout the watershed (see the Range section of this plan description).

The method for improving the vegetative cover should be an increased level of livestock grazing management. Common techniques include fencing, water developments, and various grazing methods (see the Range section of this plan description).

All vegetative increases would go to watershed and wildlife. BLM would stabilize livestock allocations at current levels, unless monitoring indicates short-term reductions are needed to rehabilitate abused areas.

This plan would manage the riparian area adjoining the South Fork of Deep Creek in the Deep Creek-Battle Creek ONA to improve vegetation, streambank stability, and reduce the total sediment load. The result would be protection and enhancement of the existing fishery and improved shallow groundwater storage.

Oil and gas activities would dispose of drilling fluids, produced water, and other waste products in accordance with state and federal laws.

BLM would claim water rights on all water sources on public lands within the ONAs. Co-held claims may be agreed to in special situations such as the permittee contributing significant funding on stock watering facilities. If a co-held claim is enacted, the permittee must agree to a stipulation releasing his portion of the claim to BLM if he relinquishes his grazing permit. The permittee would be compensated for his contribution in the project.

SOILS

Soil trampling and erosion would be reduced by controlling season-of-use and degree of use by livestock as intensive grazing methods are implemented on all ONA allotments. More precipitation would soak into the soil as vegetation ground cover increases, resulting in more vegetation production in riparian zones. The vegetation increase would reduce soil erosion along stream banks and drainage ways.

NOXIOUS PLANTS

Noxious plants are a threat throughout the RMF and can cause a variety of ecological, social and economic impacts. These plants have a variety of adverse affects on public and private resources: suppression of native plants; reduction of environmental quality; degradation and loss of wildlife habitats and supporting populations; and reducing economic benefits.

The BLM would implement the Integrated Pest Management (IPM) program to reduce or eradicate noxious plants in the ONAs with emphasis on biological control. Herbicides, mechanical or manual methods could be used under the IPM program along roads, trails, and on small upland infestations to contain or eradicate specific noxious plants on BLM-administered areas. The biological agents approach would be the preferred method, however, chemicals or mechanical control efforts may be applied if biological agents are unavailable, or the size of infestations (small, isolated) makes biological agents impractical.

Biological control is the use of natural plant parasites to reduce noxious plant densities to tolerable levels in grasslands, riparian areas or woodlands. Biological control agents would be used as the major noxious plants control mechanism on the ONAs.

Biological control, when specific plant species agents are available, is superior to chemical control for these reasons: environmentally advantageous; existing beneficial insect populations are preserved; no impact on water quality; no toxic residues; control is specific to target plants; no safety periods to observe; prolonged action requires fewer applications; no effect on wildlife; no human risk, and lower program costs.

The negative factors of chemical treatment include: human health risk; high annual costs; wildlife and fisheries damages and loss; water quality degradation, and considerable public opposition to their use.

The Lewistown District, BLM noxious plants control/eradication program and policy for the ONAs is in compliance with the Northwest Area Noxious Weed Control Program Final Environmental Impact Statement, December 1985 as supplemented April 1987 and the Montana (BLM) Noxious Weed Control Program Record of Decision, May 5, 1987.

FIRE

Wildfires: The U.S. Forest Service would use appropriate suppression action in ONAs and use heavy equipment only when necessary to prevent fire from spreading to adjacent private landowners. Normal suppression techniques would include pumper trucks and hand-line construction crews. Air attacks are permissible if fires escape initial attack and appear to be threatening adjacent lands. The initial action agency (USFS) would locate fire camps and associated facilities outside the ONAs.

Prescribed Burns: Specific areas where prescribed burns can improve vegetation condition have yet to be inventoried and prioritized, but this will be completed by 1990. Areas where prescribed burning can benefit range condition and wildlife habitat include: rough fescue and/or Idaho fescue grassland benches where a majority of fescue plants have become "wolfy" with the highest priority of burning given to those benches important as bighorn sheep and elk winter range; and decadent aspen groves in need of regeneration for wildlife.

Modified suppression techniques and prescribed burns can improve vegetation vigor and increased ground cover for soil and watershed stability.

These techniques can change vegetation by reducing decadent plant growth which will improve plant vigor and density; and by changing composition of the present species of grasses, forbs, and shrubs.

Fuel management would be treated on a site-by-site basis.

ADMINISTRATIVE ACCESS

The ONAs are closed to all forms of motorized vehicles. However, administrative vehicular access would be allowed agency personnel for project and range allotment monitoring, and resource use evaluations. This administrative access is restricted to designated roads and trails.

Livestock permittees would be allowed administrative access on a permit basis to administer their livestock lease (to include but not limited to: spring, pipeline, and fence maintenance, salt dispersal, livestock inspection and veterinarian care). This access is limited to designated roads/trails only and is subject to any stipulations imposed by the agency. Cross-country travel would not be authorized.

Seismic activity, conducted by ground-traveling motorized vehicles, would be allowed access on a permitted basis, limited to designated roads/trails and subject to stipulations imposed by the agency. Cross-country motorized travel for seismic exploration would not be permitted.

This Activity Plan will be amended to reflect a more restrictive administrative access policy should monitoring indicate this form of motorized access is damaging the ONA values.

Please refer to Appendix 6 for ONA maps depicting the administrative access routes, restrictions, and conditions.

Management Direction Summary

The policy statements and management direction given in this Activity Plan are summarized in Appendix 7.

Supplemental resource information and specific public participation and coordination information is given at the conclusion of the Appendix Section.

This AP was prepared by the staffs of the Lewistown District BLM Office, Airport Road, Lewistown, Montana; and the Great Falls Resource Area Office, P.O. Box 2865, Great Falls, Montana.

MONITORING AND EVALUATION SECTION

The purpose of this section is to clearly establish an operational process for monitoring and evaluating each resource to ensure that what was proposed is happening and within technical limits. The results of these data collection processes are essential to the budget process which will result in the finances necessary to accomplish programs and projects.

NO ACTION PLAN

WILDLIFE AND FISHERIES

BIG GAME HABITAT ANALYSIS

Monitoring of bunchgrass utilization and determination of condition class of bunchgrass in the East Front allotment/ Battle Creek-Deep Creek and Chute Mountain ONAs was accomplished on two transects on the crucial sheep winter range between the forks of Deep Creek from 1966 to 1980. Then, because of access difficulties, this level of monitoring ceased.

Two "woody riparian trend transects" (Myers, L.H., 1987) were established Chicken Coulee allotment inside and outside aspen/riparian areas important to grizzly bear in 1984. These transects have been monitored yearly since their establishment, and this monitoring would continue at least at two year intervals.

POPULATION AND SEASONAL DISTRIBUTION ANALYSIS

A significant amount of species specific information has been collected on the ONAs by the Interagency RMF Wildlife Monitoring and Investigation Program.

BLM and other involved agencies are committed to monitoring grizzly bear populations and habitat changes in the Northern Continental Divide Ecosystem according to the Recovery Plan (newest version in draft).

RECREATION

The visual resource will be monitored to ensure that ONAs meet the VRM Class II objectives. Each ONA will be checked a minimum of three times per year, in compliance with the monitoring and evaluation plan of the HRMP.

The ORV use will be monitored in conjunction with visual standards mentioned above for compliance of the closed designation.

Visitor use will be monitored at the Ear Mountain trailhead along the South Fork of the Teton River. The "no overnight camping" restriction will be checked on an "as needed" basis.

Signs and ORV barriers will be monitored annually for maintenance and replacement needs. Form 9130-4 will be used to record the necessary sign data.

The existing trail system will be checked once a year to assess the impact of visitor use and to program any necessary repair work.

RANGE-LIVESTOCK

BLIND HORSE ONA

Chicken Coulee Allotment

Management objectives and methods of monitoring are outlined and have been evaluated after each rotation cycle. The range condition and trend is read every 4 years by the USFS through a private contractor (see Table 14). The BLM has supplemented the USFS studies with utilization readings and by securing actual use reports from the operator each year. Climate is also recorded from the Montana Climatological Data and used in evaluating the management plan. The changes in vegetation and soil condition on three pasture transects from 1976 to 1983 are:

TABLE 14

VEGETATION & SOIL CONDITION — 1976 TO 1983

	Index		Condition		Index		Condition	
Pasture	**1976**	**1983**	**1976**	**1983**	**1976**	**1983**	**1976**	**1983**
North	14	17	Fair	Good	84	89	Excellent	
Middle	16	16	Good	Good	70	73	Good	Excellent
South	17	19	Good	Good	90	90	Excellent	

The net changes in indices are North Pasture +8%; Middle Pasture +3%; and South Pasture +2%.

Rinker Creek Tract

No regularly scheduled range monitoring is done. The area may prove valuable as a non-grazed comparison area to the adjacent Chicken Coulee allotment which is grazed. There is no preferred plan for grazing proposed since this tract has been identified in the Headwaters Final RMP as a no grazing area.

Pamburn Tract

Monitoring is not done on a schedule, but it should be monitored every 5 years with the Cowtrack allotment schedule. If horse use is monitored at any level above slight utilization on the Pamburn tract, jackleg fencing may be proposed to protect the wildlife habitat. The HRMP apparently overlooked Lot 4, Section 30, T. 25 N., R. 8 W. as it was not listed in the winter-spring bighorn sheep habitat. This lot should be added to the sheep habitat as it is classified as unsuitable for livestock grazing. There is no preferred plan for grazing proposed since this tract has been identified in the HRMP as a no grazing area.

Cowtrack Allotment

Monitoring has consisted of an allotment review every 5 years.

EAR MOUNTAIN ONA

McCarthy Individual Allotment

Monitoring consists of allotment condition reporting, photographic stations and utilization data recorded on a 10-year schedule with other custodial allotments.

Ear Mountain Allotment

A preliminary review in 1985, showed the key range sites (Yeager Flat) to be in fair to good range condition. The allotment is monitored on a 5-year schedule for range condition, trend, and utilization.

CHUTE MOUNTAIN ONA

East Front Allotment

Rangeland condition monitoring consists of one condition and trend transect established and read in 1981. This transect read "fair" for range class and has not been reread. Lupine (23%) and shrubby cinquefoil (11%) have invaded this range site. Actual use reports and utilization have not been recorded because access into the Chute Mountain has been limited. The initial study was established by helicopter.

DEEP CREEK–BATTLE CREEK ONA

East Front Allotment

Rangeland monitoring occurred on one transect on one key range location on the South Fork of Deep Creek. Readings in 1981 and 1987, show poor range condition.

Green Timber Allotment

On-the-ground monitoring to verify the carrying capacity reduction has not been established because of the remoteness of the allotment (no roads and difficult horse access). Some general photographic monitoring was recorded in 1984 and 1985. Actual use reports sent to the operator have not produced any data. The operator indicated dissatisfaction with the amount of use he is getting in the allotment in 1987.

AIR QUALITY

No air quality sampling will be done under this plan.

LANDS—ACCESS

The access acquisition plan would be reviewed every 5 years for compliance, review and updating. The first review of the access acquisition would occur in 1993.

WATERSHED

BLM will use monitoring results obtained by range and wildlife transects to evaluate watershed condition. Water quality sampling would only be conducted under emergency situations such as fish kills or in conjunction with special projects such as oil and gas development, mining activities, or chemical control of noxious plants.

PREFERRED PLAN

WILDLIFE AND FISHERIES

BIG GAME HABITAT ANALYSIS

Results of trend monitoring, as proposed in the Range section of this plan, will yield analysis concerning trends in wildlife habitat condition. Duplication of effort should be avoided when monitoring this plan, therefore coordination between the wildlife and range program will be a primary goal of this monitoring program. Vegetation (habitat) studies proposed in addition to those given in the range section would include:

Continue monitoring the Pamburn and Blind Horse exclosures in the Chicken Coulee allotment by the "woody riparian trend transect" method, (Myers, L.H., 1987). Exclosures will be monitored at a minimum of 2-year intervals.

Selected sites on critically important deer winter ranges of creeping juniper habitat will be monitored by the Canfield (1941) line interception and Daubenmire (1959) methods at three transect locations. At least two transects on the East Front and Chicken Coulee allotments should be established which would monitor conditions on deer winter range encompassing all ONAs. The resulting data will monitor browse condition and trend.

POPULATION AND SEASONAL DISTRIBUTION ANALYSIS

A significant amount of wildlife population monitoring was undertaken in the Interagency RMF Wildlife Monitoring and Investigation program which resulted in publication of the RMF Wildlife Guidelines. This information has been published in a number of reports. The information collected is an excellent base with which to compare future changes and trends. Critical habitats and areas of wildlife importance have been fully documented.

Future monitoring will be a cooperative effort involving BLM, MDFW&P, and FS. The MDFW&P takes the lead in population monitoring for the important populations of the entire RMF, and the BLM can extrapolate the collected data for ONAs. More intensive population monitoring by aerial and ground reconnaissance can be conducted on ONAs by BLM personnel as budget and time allow. Such surveys should be completed at appropriate times on a yearly basis. Monitoring of wildlife population responses to increased human access and intensive grazing management, as proposed in this AP, should be a priority. If visitor use levels become detrimental to grizzly bear in the spring or ungulates during winter, it will be necessary to limit human visitation during those seasons.

BLM will participate in monitoring of grizzly bear recovery parameters as directed by the "draft" recovery plan. Emphasis will be on the observation of females with young and habitat changes as determined by the Cumulative Effects Model (Godtel, 1987).

RECREATION

The visual resource will be monitored to ensure that the ONAs meet the VRM CLass I and II standards for the area. The contrast rating format (BLM manual handbook 8431-1, Rel 8-30, 1-17-86) will provide the techniques needed for proposed project and activity planning. Each ONA will be evaluated at least three times during the year to determine if the visual standards have been maintained. This is within the guidance outlined in the Great Falls Resource Area Monitoring and Evaluation Plan for the HRMP.

The criteria for each ROS class in the ONAs will be evaluated every 5 years. If any change in acreage of these ROS classes occurs, BLM will determine whether to amend the AP or call it plan maintenance.

The ORV use will be monitored to ensure that ORV users comply with the closed designation. Actual violations of the closure, plus resource degradation, user conflicts, or user safety will be the measurements (indicators) evaluated. The ONAs will be checked on a monthly basis during the fall hunting season and at least once each during the spring and summer periods.

Although no developed recreation sites currently exist, the 12.75-acre parcel near Ear Mountain along the South Fork of the Teton River has been designated for multiple-use which includes a trailhead site. No overnight camping is allowed here and the area will be monitored at least three times during the year.

Signs and ORV barriers will be monitored early each summer for maintenance and possible replacement needs. Form 9130-4 will be used to record the necessary sign data.

The internal trail system will be monitored annually to assess the impact of visitor use, to document deteriorating conditions of trails, if any, and to determine the necessary repair and construction work needed to maintain the network in a safe condition for the visitor.

RANGE-LIVESTOCK

BLIND HORSE ONA

Chicken Coulee Allotment

Monitoring range condition and trend will continue by USFS contract in each pasture every 4 years, or by BLM each year in the rest-treatment pasture. Utilization, climate and actual use data will be recorded every year. The ecological site method (Daubenmire transect) will be used by the BLM to record vegetation cover and composition data. Allotment evaluations will occur every cycle (4 years).

Cowtrack Allotment

Wildlife values, especially winter—spring habitat for bighorn sheep and mule deer, are most significant and should be monitored to prevent conflict between custodial livestock grazing and the need for residual wildlife vegetation. A range condition and trend Daubenmire transect is to be read every 2 years. Utilization monitoring to measure livestock use and residual vegetation for wintering wildlife will be read every year.

EAR MOUNTAIN ONA

McCarthy Individual Allotment

Monitoring of range condition, trend and utilization will continue on a 10-year custodial level basis.

Ear Mountain Allotment

A 5-year schedule for monitoring range condition, trend, and utilization will continue, and will require a yearly actual use report from the operator.

DEEP CREEK—BATTLE CREEK ONA

East Front Allotment

A minimum of one range condition and trend transect per pasture should be established and read once per grazing cycle (3-4 years). Utilization will be read in each pasture every year. Actual use reports will be secured from the operator every year. Climate will be recorded every year. An Activity Plan evaluation will be made at the end of each grazing cycle.

Green Timber Allotment

Livestock herding plan monitoring is important to the success of achieving the objectives. The operator will record the dates and numbers of livestock herded onto the federal pasture in an actual use report each year. There may be some stray livestock that move into the uplands without herding, but the number is not expected to be significant because the cattle move to the lower elevations. Utilization will be recorded each year and range condition and trend will be recorded every 4 years to monitor the success of this system. Climate data such as precipitation and temperature from the Gibson Dam station will also be taken. Evaluations will occur after each 4-year trend study.

CULTURAL

Any significant cultural resources identified in future inventories will be periodically inspected (at least every second year) to determine if impacts are occurring from erosion or artifact collecting. Should such impacts occur, controls may be required (trail route modification, area closure) or the sites may require mitigation or stabilization.

Monitoring would only occur if a significant site is identified and impacts would occur.

LANDS

The access acquisition plan would be reviewed every 5 years for compliance, review and updating. The first review of the access acquisition would occur in 1993.

WATERSHED

Vegetative monitoring results obtained by range and wildlife will be used to evaluate watershed condition. Water monitoring will be done only in emergency situations such as fish kills, oil and gas spills, etc. that require short-term, high-intensity monitoring.

AIR QUALITY

Air quality evaluation by air sampling stations will be done as the need arises (e.g., oil-gas developments).

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APPENDIX

Appendix 1: HEADWATERS RMP POLICY AND DIRECTION

The Headwaters RMP/EIS derived resources management direction which will be followed by all relative resources in the development and execution of the plan.

1. Wildlife and Fisheries:

Wildlife reintroductions and fish stocking proposals will be evaluated and recommendations will be made to the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife, and Parks (MDFW&P).

2. Wildlife and Fisheries:

A Wildlife Habitat Management Plan (HMP) will be prepared prior to any wildlife reintroductions.

3. Wildlife and Fisheries:

HMPs or Coordinated Resource Management Plans (CRMP) will be used to identify projects necessary to stabilize and/or improve unsatisfactory or declining wildlife habitat condition.

4. Wildlife and Fisheries:

No activities will be permitted in habitat for threatened and endangered species that would jeopardize the continued existence of such species. Management activities in T/E habitat will be designed to benefit those species through habitat improvement as per the Endangered Species Act (ESA).

5. Wildlife and Fisheries:

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and MDFW&P will be consulted prior to implementing projects that may affect T/E species. Per the ESA.

6. Wildlife and Fisheries:

Management actions within occupied grizzly bear habitat will be consistent with the goal and objectives contained in the Grizzly Bear Recovery Plan (USDI, FW 1982) and the guidelines developed through the Interagency Wildlife Monitoring Program for mineral exploration and development.

7. Wildlife and Fisheries:

Animal damage control programs will be coordinated with the U.S. FWS, and in the case of aerial gunning requests, with Montana Department of Agriculture.

8. Wildlife and Fisheries:

Fish and wildlife habitat will continue to be evaluated on a case-by-case basis as a part of project level planning. Stipulations will be attached as appropriate to assure compatibility of projects with critical, crucial and essential habitat.

9. Wildlife and Fisheries:

Water developments will not be established for livestock where significant conflicts over vegetation would result. Water will be provided in allotments (including rested pastures) during seasonal periods for wildlife.

10. Wildlife and Fisheries:

Vegetative manipulation projects will be designed to minimize impact on wildlife habitat and to improve it whenever possible. Consult with MDFW&P in advance of all vegetative manipulation projects.

11. Wildlife and Fisheries:

Sufficient forage and cover will be provided for wildlife seasonal habitat.

12. Wildlife and Fisheries:

Wildlife forage and cover requirements will be incorporated in livestock allotment management plans (AMP) and will be specific to areas of primary wildlife use. Riparian habitat needs will be taken into consideration in developing livestock grazing systems and pasture designs. Some of the techniques which could be used are: changing class of stock; either eliminating hot season grazing or scheduling hot season grazing for only one out of three years; salting away from riparian areas; laying-out pasture fences so that each pasture has as much riparian habitat as possible; locating fences so that they do not confine or concentrate livestock near the riparian zone; developing alternative sources of water to lessen the grazing pressure on the riparian habitat; and as a last resort, excluding livestock completely from the riparian habitat by protective fencing.

13. Wildlife and Fisheries:

Range (livestock) improvement will be designed to achieve both wildlife and range objectives. Existing fences may be modified and new fences will be built so as to allow wildlife passage. Modify fences which do not allow for wildlife passage.

14. Recreation—Visual Resources:

At a minimum, Class II VRM guidelines will be applied on the ONAs. Visual resources will continue to be evaluated as a part of activity and project planning; stipulations will be attached as appropriate to assure the compatibility of projects with management objectives for visual resources.

15. Recreation—Motorcycle Use Areas:

Federal (BLM-administered) land along the Rocky Mountain Front Range ONAs is not available for motorcycle events.

16. Recreation—Travel Planning and Motorized Vehicle Use:

The ONAs are closed to motorized vehicle use.

17. Recreation:

Investment of public funds for new recreation developments will be permitted only on lands identified for retention in public ownership.

18. Range (Livestock):

AMPs will be written to analyze actions which affect the environment and alternatives to those actions and mitigate adverse impacts. All allotments in which range improvement funds are to be spent will be subjected to an economic analysis.

19. Cultural Resources:

Cultural resources will be inventoried and evaluated as part of project planning in compliance with EO 11593 and Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended; stipulations will be attached as appropriate to assure compatibility of projects with proposed management objectives for cultural resources.

20. Oil and Gas:

Seasonal stipulations on oil and gas exploration and/or production will be required in bighorn sheep, elk, and mule deer winter/spring range and mountain goat kidding areas.

No surface occupancy will be permitted on new leases in the ONAs.

As described in the HRMP, no leasing will be permitted in the core of the NSO areas.

21. Minerals—Saleable:

Applications for removal of common variety mineral materials will continue to be processed on a case-by-case basis.

Stipulations to protect important surface values will be attached based on interdisciplinary review of each proposal.

22. Minerals—Locatable:

All federal land will remain open to mineral entry and development unless previously withdrawn. Locatable mineral exploration and development will be regulated under 43 CFR 3809.

23. Lands:

Federal land within the retention areas (four ONAs) will remain in public ownership.

24. Lands-Utility/Transportation Corridor:

Public lands along the Rocky Mountain Front (ONAs) are to be managed as avoidance areas (areas generally not available for utility or transportation corridor development). Exceptions may be permitted based on consideration of the following criteria: type of and need for facility proposed; conflicts with other resource values and uses, including potential values and uses; and availability of alternatives and/or mitigation measures.

25. Water:

Water quality will be maintained or improved in accordance with state and federal standards. BLM will consult with state agencies on proposed projects that may significantly affect water quality. Management actions on public land within municipal watersheds will be designed to protect water quality and quantity. Management activities in riparian zones will be designed to maintain or improve riparian habitat condition.

26. Water:

Authorized improvements will avoid riparian zones. Water resources will be evaluated on a case-by-case basis as a part of project planning. Stipulations will be attached, as necessary.

27. Forestry:

Public land in the four ONAs is set aside from forest management.

28. Fire:

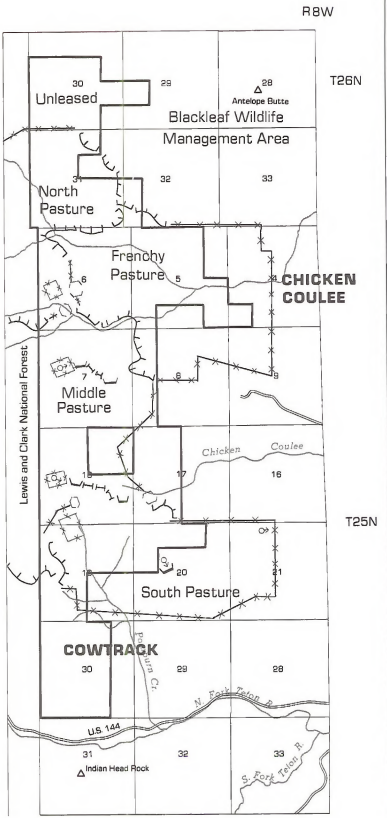
Continue to provide control during the first burning period of all wildfires on or threatening public land until the 1978 Normal Fire Year Plan is updated. Then modified suppression areas may be established based on the following criteria: values at risk; fire behavior; fire occurrence; beneficial fire effects; fire suppression costs and consistency with other agency plans and policies.

Prescribed burning will be used in support of resource management objectives.

Appendix 2: LIVESTOCK LEASES AND IMPROVEMENT PROJECTS

Blind Horse
Outstanding Natural Area

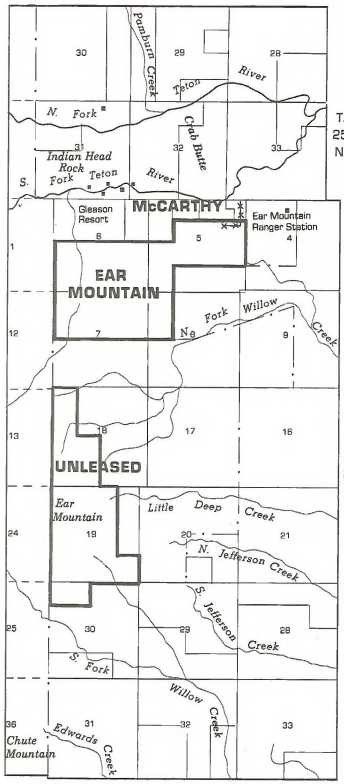
Figure 6. Range Improvements

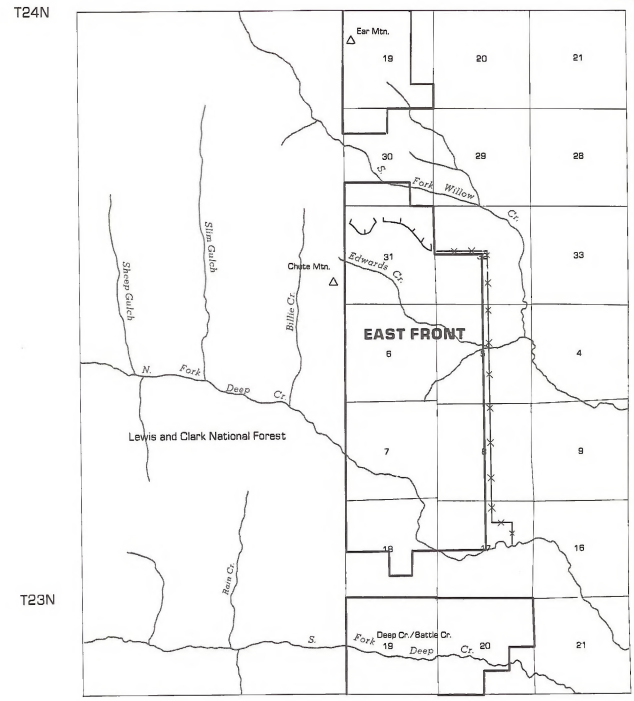


1:63,360

Ear Mountain
Outstanding Natural Area

Figure 7. Range Improvements





Chute Mountain
Outstanding Natural Area

Figure 8. Range Improvements

1:63,360

NORTH

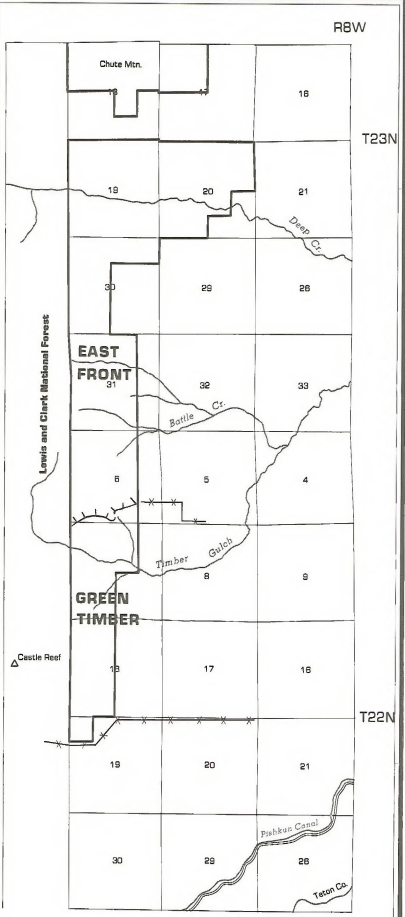
0 1 2 3 Miles

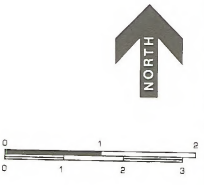
0 1 2 3 4 5 Kilometers

Deep Creek/ Battle Creek

Outstanding Natural Area

Figure 9. Range Improvements





Appendix 3: OIL-GAS LEASES

Blind Horse
Outstanding Natural Area

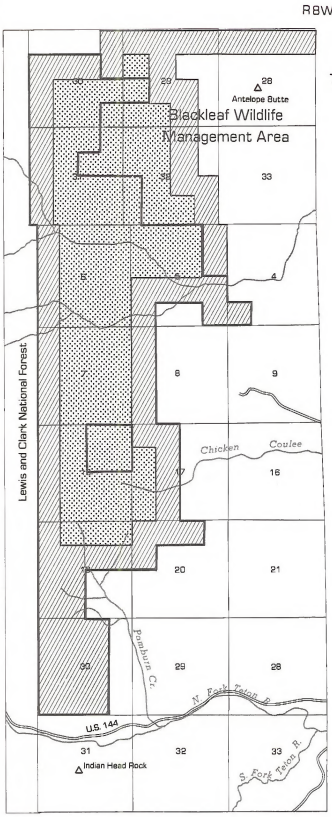


Figure 14. Oil and Gas No Lease and No Surface Occupancy Areas.

ONA

No Surface Occupancy

No Lease Area

NORTH

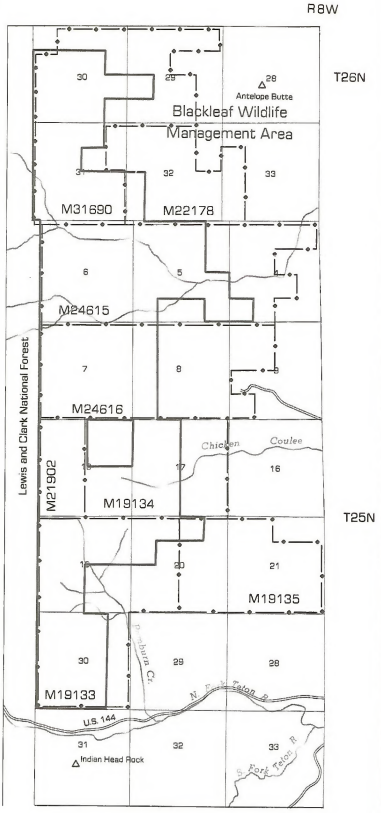
0 1 2 Miles

0 1 2 3 Kilometers

1:63,360

Blind Horse
Outstanding Natural Area

Figure 15. Oil and Gas Leases



ONA

Oil & Gas Lease Line
M00079 and Number

NORTH

0 1 2 Miles
0 1 2 3 Kilometers

1:63,360

Ear Mountain
Outstanding Natural Area

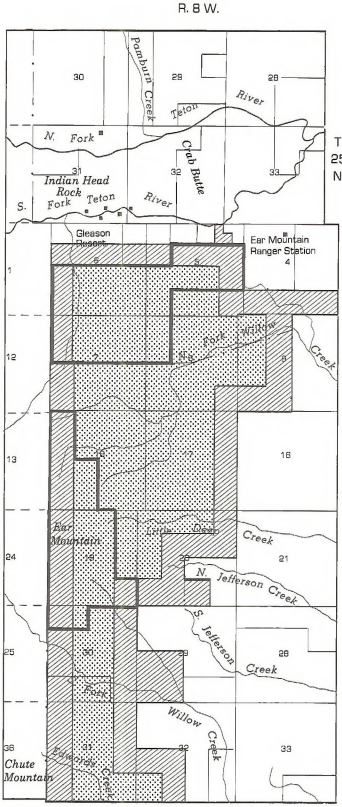


Figure 16. Oil and Gas No Lease and No Surface Occupancy Areas.

ONA

No Surface Occupancy

No Lease Area

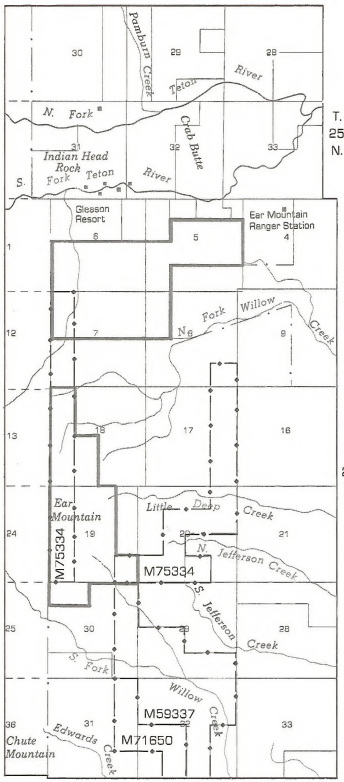
NORTH

0 1 2 Miles

0 1 2 3 Kilometers

Ear Mountain
Outstanding Natural Area

Figure 17. Oil and Gas Leases



ONA

Oil & Gas Lease Line

M00079 and Number

NORTH

0 1 2 Miles

0 1 2 3 Kilometers

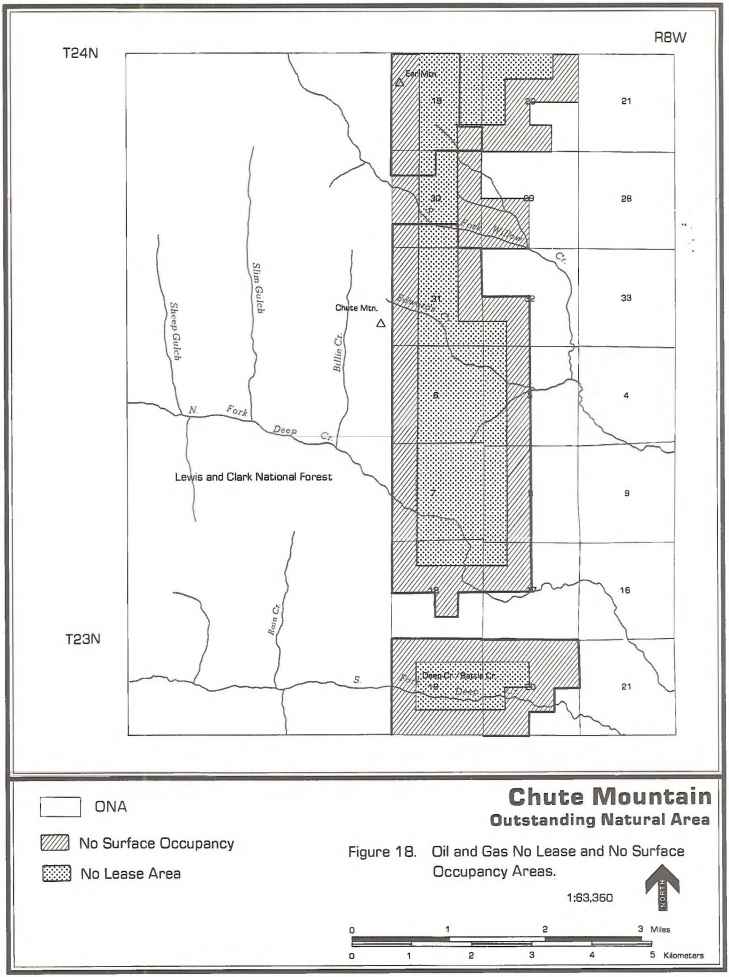
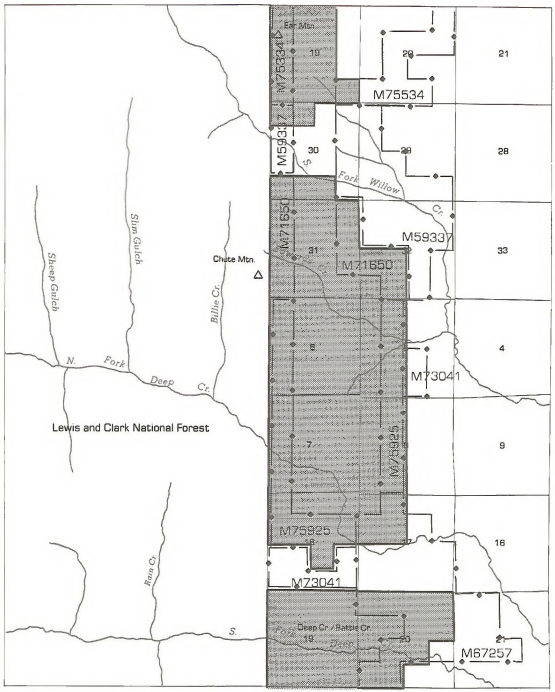


Figure 18. Oil and Gas No Lease and No Surface Occupancy Areas.



ONA Area

Oil & Gas Lease Line

M00079 and Number

Chute Mountain
Outstanding Natural Area

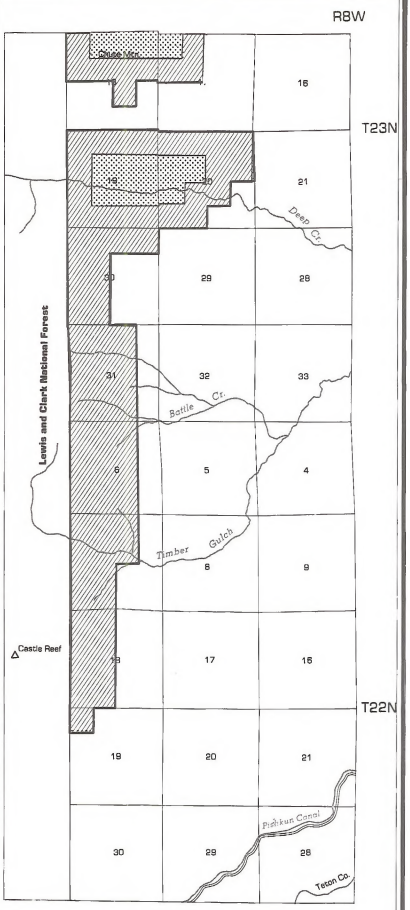
Figure 19. Oil and Gas Leases

1:63,380

NORTH

0 1 2 3 Miles

0 1 2 3 4 5 Kilometers



Deep Creek/ Battle Creek

Outstanding Natural Area

Figure 20. Oil and Gas No Lease and No Surface Occupancy Areas.

ONA Boundary

No Surface Occupancy

No Lease Area

NORTH

0 1 2

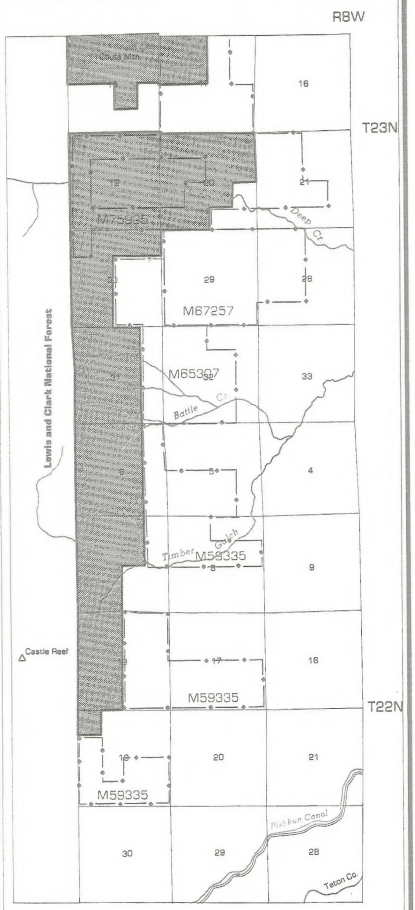
0 1 2 3

1:63,360

Deep Creek/ Battle Creek

Outstanding Natural Area

Figure 21. Oil and Gas Leases



ONA

Oil & Gas Lease Line

M00079 and Number

NORTH

0 1 2

0 1 2 3

1:63,360

Appendix 4: WILDLIFE RESOURCES OF THE ONAS

OUTSTANDING NATURAL AREAS

	WILDLIFE VALUES	BLIND HORSE CREEK	EAR MOUNTAIN	CHUTE MOUNTAIN	DEEP CREEK/BATTLE CREEK
THREATENED & ENDANGERED	Grizzly bear 1, 6	ONAs are important spring, summer, and to a lesser extent fall grizzly bear habitat. The western edges of ONAs could possibly serve as den habitat, especially on Chute Mountain.			
	Gray Wolf 1, 7	ONAs lie within the Northwest Montana Recovery Area and are considered important for the future recovery of the gray wolf in the East Front and Bob marshall ecosystems. Recovery habitat is directly related to big game (prey species) habitats.			
	Peregrine Falcon 1, 5	No known nests but migrating peregrines have been noted along the Front. The Rocky Mountain Front is being considered as a reintroduction area and the high cliffs running through ONAs are rated as good to excellent habitat.			
	Bald Eagle 1, 5	Occurrence is generally confined to the major rivers such as the Sun, Teton, and Dearborn which do not traverse thru the ONAs. Incidental use by spring migrants may occur in ONAs. No nesting activity is known to occur at this time.			
BIG GAME	Elk 1	Use by elk is minor except at the north end near the Blackleaf Wildlife Management Area.	Use not documented	Light Use	Limited to Green Timber Gulch; lightly used winter/spring habitat.
	Mule Deer 1, 2, 3, 8	Primary winter range and fall/spring transitional range for 500.	Winter and "transition" range for 500 animals.	Mostly fall/spring range with some secondary winter usage for two herds of 1300 and 500 animals.	Fall/spring and crucial winter range for 1300 animals.
	Bighorn Sheep 1, 8	Seasonal habitat 30	Winter/spring habitat for 80 animals.	Used as year long habitat for two herds; Ear Mtn. and Deep Crk. of 80 and 200 animals respectively.	Year long habitat with concentrated winter/spring use of Deep Creek herd; 200 head.
	Rocky Mountain Goat 1, 4, 8	Crucial habitat, principally spring and summer range.	Occasional Use	Light Use	Light Use
	Black Bear 1, 6, 8	The Rocky Mountain Front is excellent black bear country and ONAs represent some of the better habitat areas.			
	Raptors 1, 5	Cliffs are prominent throughout the ONAs and cliff habitats are especially important raptor habitats on the Rocky Mountain Front. Prairie falcons and golden eagles are the most common cliff nesters here.			
	Mountain Grouse (blue, ruffed, Franklin's)	ONAs are excellent habitat for all three species.			
	Fisheries 9	S. Fork of Deep Creek Upper reaches could possibly contain pure strain of Westslope cutthroat; lower reaches contains rainbow/ cutthroat hybrids, and brook trout.			

WILDLIFE TABLE BIBLIOGRAPHY

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2. Kasworm, W.F. 1981. Distribution and populations characteristics of mule deer along the East Front, north central Montana. Unpubl. M.S. Thesis. Montana State University, Bozeman, MT. 73 pp.
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8. USDI, BLM. 1986. Special Designation of Recently Acquired Land in the Rocky Mountain Front (Ear Mountain Addition), Planning Amendment to the Headwaters RMP/EIS.
9. Hill, B., MDFW&P Fishery Biologist, Personal Communication on 3/21/88.

Appendix 5: BIOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT

Pursuant to Section 7 (c) of the Endangered Species Act, 1973, for the OUTSTANDING NATURAL AREAS of the Rocky Mountain Front COORDINATED ACTIVITY PLAN 1988

Bureau of Land Management
Montana State Office
Lewistown District
Great Falls Resource Area

INTRODUCTION

A Biological Assessment was prepared for the Headwaters Resource Management Plan/Environmental Impact Statement (RMP/EIS) in May of 1983. Since this Coordinated Activity Plan (AP) for Outstanding Natural Areas (ONAs) is an extension of that RMP/EIS, many of the program activities proposed in the AP were consulted on previously, at least in the generic sense, and should require minimal further discussion. An example of this would include oil and gas leasing, exploration and development.

Proposals by the range and wildlife programs for more intensive livestock management and habitat improvement on ONAs would benefit wildlife. The positive aspects of this level of management, as related to grizzly bear and gray wolf, have also been previously summarized in the RMP/EIS.

Other programs, lands and recreation are proposing increased access to ONA boundaries which would encourage human visitation into grizzly bear and gray wolf prey species habitats which have previously been relatively undisturbed. These proposals would adversely affect these species and will require formal consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

BLM is prepared to present a completed Biological Evaluation and to request formal consultation on only the Blind Horse access route for the following reasons: (1) the route is well defined as an existing road; (2) discussions, with a favorable response, have already been undertaken with the landowner concerning access acquisition; and (3) the route lies in a Bear Management Unit (BMU) with a structured Geographic Information System (GIS) allowing analysis with the Cumulative Effects Model (CEM) (USFS, 1987).

Other routes to ONA boundaries being considered for future public access will be formally consulted on when they are better defined. Furthermore, other Bear Management Units (BMUs) may be mapped for habitat components and the remainder of the GIS data prepared at that time.

THREATENED AND ENDANGERED SPECIES OCCURRENCE AND AFFECTS FROM ACTIVITY PLAN PROPOSALS

Four species classified as threatened and endangered occur along the Rocky Mountain Front (RMF), and in the ONAs. They include the endangered bald eagle, peregrine falcon, and gray wolf and the threatened grizzly bear. Documented occurrence, abundance, relative importance of habitats, and other pertinent factors have been documented in the numerous studies undertaken and completed through the RMF Task Force effort which resulted in publication of the Interagency RMF Wildlife Guidelines (BLM, 1987). Summaries of each species status, complete with an evaluation of the effects on each species from the activities proposed in this plan, are as follows.

Bald Eagle
(Haliaeetus leucocephalus)

No known bald eagle nest sites have been documented along the RMF; however, bald eagles are present on the RMF from September through April as an uncommon winter resident and migrant. Observations of eagles are most likely to be made east of the ONAs where fisheries and open water are more prevalent (DuBois, 1984).

A "no effect" determination is made as nothing proposed for ONA management would occur in areas bald eagles would be expected to frequent, especially during the breeding season. Should the unlikely occurrence of nesting activity by a pair of bald eagles ever be documented on the RMF, BLM would adhere to the RMF Wildlife Guidelines, which would alleviate any "affect" possibilities. This would include preventing human visitation or other disturbing activities within influence zones of an active nest territory.

Peregrine Falcon
(Falco peregrinus)

Suitable, but presently unoccupied, peregrine falcon habit occurs along the RMF, and this area has been proposed as a possible reintroduction area. Occasional adult peregrines assumed to be fall migrants, have been observed.

DuBois (1984) classified cliff habitats thought to be most suitable for peregrines as those which are close to extensive riparian habitat (within five kilometers), over 50 meters in height and one kilometer in extent, with numerous nesting ledges, and the majority of the cliffs under 2,300 meters in elevation. Potential nesting areas meeting these criteria were documented in both the Deep Creek—Battle Creek and Chute Mountain ONAs.

A "no effect" determination for all resource proposals is made for the peregrine for the same reasons as given for bald eagle (adherence to the RMF Wildlife Guidelines).

Gray Wolf
(Canis lupis)

The Wolf Ecology Project, University of Montana (Mattson and Ream 1978) has gathered wolf occurrence information on the RMF. Most wolf observations were made prior to that time, but with the recent advent of the "magic pack" in Glacier National Park (Robbins, J., 1986, Ream, et al. 1975, Ream, 1985) the possibility of wolf occupation including pack activity along the RMF is more of a reality. The RMF is excellent wolf habitat because of the large number of prey specie winter/spring ranges along it and because of the large expanse of wilderness behind it.

The most abundant prey inhabiting the RMF in areas where ONAs occur is mule deer, however, bighorn sheep occur in all ONAs and are relatively abundant in the Deep Creek—Battle Creek and Ear Mountain ONAs in the winter and spring. The Blackleaf elk herd would be available as prey at the northern end of the Blind Horse ONA (see Appendix 4).

The key to gray wolf recovery is maintenance or improvement of a healthy prey base. Some of the proposals put forth in the AP definitely contribute toward recovery in a very positive manner while other aspects of the AP could negatively affect prey species and ultimately wolf occupancy.

Oil and gas leasing, exploration, and development policies in ONAs were firmly established in the RMP/EIS and no changes were proposed in this AP. Significant portions of the ONAs are designated as "No Lease," with the remainder as "No Surface Occupancy." The policy provides excellent protection for gray wolf prey and in combination with the seasonal restrictions for drilling determined for the remainder of federal mineral areas on the RMF it has resulted in a very positive effect when compared to previous leasing policies.

Implementation of intensive livestock grazing management practices in the Blind Horse ONA has significantly improved prey species habitats, and continuation of this level of management as proposed will at least maintain these conditions and more than likely will lead to more improvement. The Ear Mountain ONA has not been grazed under full capacity and prey species habitat is being maintained. The same level of grazing is proposed in this AP.

Present management practices have failed to improve prey specie habitats in the Deep Creek—Battle Creek and Chute Mountain ONAs (East Front Allotment). Failure to implement some system of deferred grazing has probably contributed to a continuing downward trend in prey species habitats, or at best, no improvement in these habitat areas.

Implementation of livestock management as proposed for the East Front allotment using a three-pasture, deferred-rotation grazing system supplemented with controlled burning, development of alternate water sources, and other beneficial practices will result in significant improvement in ungulate habitats. The Deep Creek—Battle Creek ONAs would provide the greatest mass of prey (principally mule deer and big horn sheep) of all ONAs. Anticipated range condition improvement would have a significant positive influence on wolf recovery.

The revised Northern Rocky Mountain Wolf Recovery Plan (Fish and Wildlife Service, 1987) lists key habitat components of wolf habitat one of which is abundance of natural prey and the other is minimal exposure to humans. ONAs definitely contribute to providing areas of minimal human exposure because of the limited existing access and the restrictive travel policies within them. However, should BLM obtain access routes to their borders both the prey base and special components could be lessened in value to the wolf.

The one access point where a route is defined and BLM is actively pursuing access is to the Blind Horse ONA along the Clark Fork of the Muddy Creek (Figure A5-1, segments A and B). This road is the same road which was upgraded to accommodate drilling of the Superior Oil Company No. 5-1 Gas Well at T. 25 N., R. 8 W., Section 5, SE¼. This action was formally consulted on during the fall of 1983, and the Biological Evaluation prepared at that time extensively discusses the importance of that immediate area to gray wolf prey species as well as to the grizzly bear. That evaluation also describes the anticipated affects to both the gray wolf and grizzly bear from increased human activities in this area.

FIGURE A5-1: ROAD AND TRAIL SYSTEMS ASSOCIATED WITH THE BLINDHORSE ONA

As described in that report, the road lies within the Blackleaf-Teton mule deer winter range (Kasworm, 1981). He considered this primary winter range for this herd segment of 400-500 deer. The primary winter range use occurs from December 15 to May 15 in "typical years." In that Biological Evaluation, BLM estimated that because of the high quality thermal cover of the ridge paralleling the north side of the access road that 30 deer/kilometer^2 might winter there. If displaced by human intrusion they would be stressed as they either sought less suitable range elsewhere or competed with other deer on other suitable range.

The greatest factors which would prevent wolf recovery in this area would be killing of wolves, either by mistake or purposefully, and loss of the food source, should wintering populations of ungulates take a downward trend in numbers.

Providing public access along this route during the winter could place similar stress as to that discussed for the Superior drilling operation if road use was significant (daily). However, BLM feels that public winter use by the public along this road would be averaging considerably less or insignificant (less than one vehicle per week) and at that level of visitation displacement of mule deer would not be likely to occur and the possibility of an illegal shooting would also be unlikely. If it became apparent that public travel during the winter (Dec. 15—May 15) was significant BLM would close the road to vehicle travel during that time.

Providing public access to the Blind Horse ONA along this route "may affect" gray wolf recovery, and we are formally requesting your opinion on this action of our Activity Plan, and we are committing to initiate, formal consultation on other ONA access routes when and if we acquire them.

Grizzly Bear
(Ursus arctos horribilis)

The grizzly bear of the RMF thrives on the transitional edge between the grassland shrub habitat type and the mountainous forest habitats. This area serves as the last plains habitat occupied by grizzlies. The ONAs lie on the western boundary of this edge and contain habitat components important to grizzly during all seasons. The spring seasonal constituent element that is of critical importance to the grizzly, as well as denning habitat, are shown on Figures A5-2 and A5-3 (Aune, 1987).

Studies of the grizzly bear on the RMF began 1974, and have continued until the present (Schallenberger, 1974, 1976, 1977, Schallenberger and Jonkel, 1978, 1979, 1979a, and 1980, Aune and Stivers 1981, 1982, 1983 and Aune, Stivers and Madel, 1984, and Aune, 1985).

Population estimates of grizzly bears on the RMF portion of the Northern Continental Divide Ecosystem range from 62-93 bears, and did not include the Badger-Two Medicine BMU which was estimated to contain an additional 16-20 individuals (Dood, et.al.).

The Battle Creek-Deep Creek, Chute Mountain, and Ear Mountain ONAs lie within the Teton-Sun BMU while the Blind Horse ONA is part of the Birch-Teton BMU. Aune, 1987, reported a density estimate of 1 bear/20 mile^2 as an average for 1980-86 for an area that essentially encompassed these BMUs. Distribution of grizzly bear observations during the 1976-86 periods of study, as related to ONA locations, is shown on Figure A5-4. It is easy to conclude that whatever management programs man implements on ONAs will have an affect, either positive or negative, on grizzly bear. All ONAs have been classified as Management Situation 1 areas under Interagency Grizzly Bear Committee guidance.

The oil and gas leasing decisions made through the Headwaters RMP/EIS impact the grizzly bear just as the gray wolf. ONA areas were either leased with "No Surface Occupancy" stipulations or not leased and all other federal minerals in important grizzly bear habitat are restricted so that occupancy by industry cannot occur during the important critical spring period. This type of leasing policy, as well as application of this type of philosophy when managing oil and gas exploration and development, will provide important protection for individual bears in future years and is considered a positive effect.

Implementation of an intensive grazing management system (three-pasture rest-rotation) supplemented by construction of two exclosures to keep cattle out of important grizzly bear riparian habitats in the Blind Horse ONA has resulted in positive improvements for bears. Grazing practices in the Ear Mountain ONA have at least maintained important bear habitats. But positive steps have not been taken to enhance important grizzly bear habitats in the Battle Creek-Deep Creek and Chute Mountain ONAs principally known as the East Front allotment.

Stivers, 1988, in his recent study of livestock grazing of grizzly bear habitat on the RMF, put forth guidelines important to managing livestock. Essentially, these were; (1) defer grazing on riparian until after July 1; (2) remove cattle before use of the riparian forage base reaches 50%; (3) and exceptions to the July 1 entry may be made if the pasture is part of a grazing system (where rest is provided).

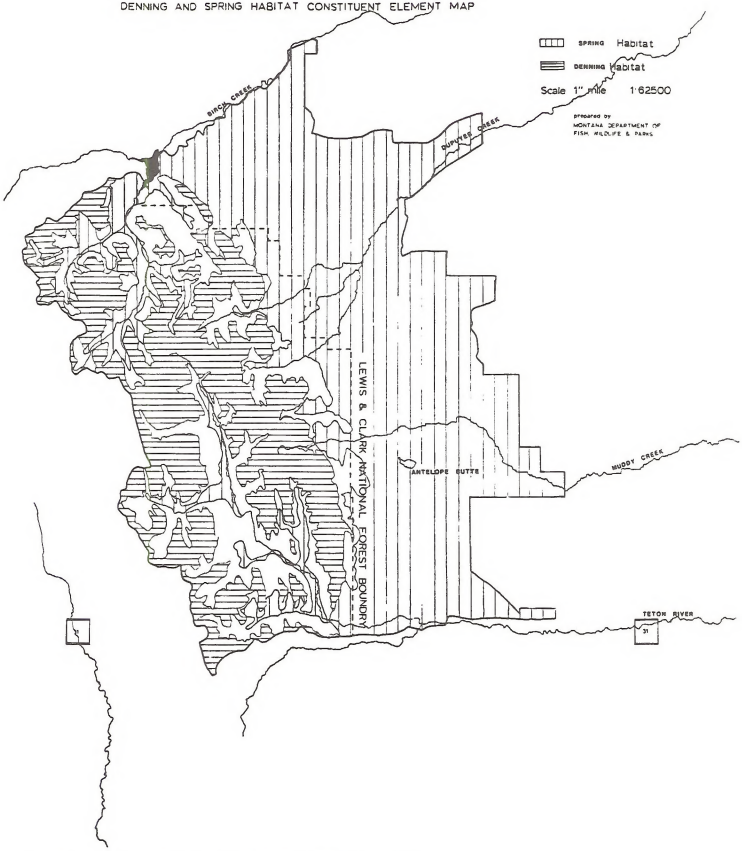


FIGURE A5-2: CONSTITUENT ELEMENT MAP, 1986

FIGURE A5-3: CONSTITUENT ELEMENT MAP, 1986

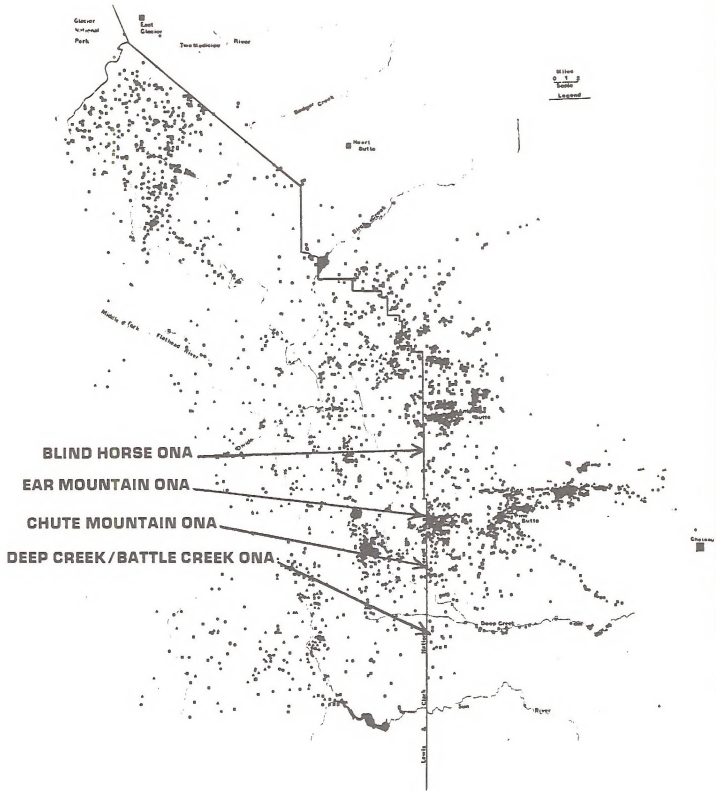


FIGURE A5-4: Distribution of 3,170 grizzly bear observations, 1976-86, north of the Sun River.

Fortunately, the phenology of vegetation on the RMF insures that livestock will not reach higher elevation ONAs until after July 1, even if they are not excluded by fences. BLM must think of the condition of all lands regardless of ownership when implementing an allotment management plan (AMP). Important bear habitats at elevations lower than the ONAs include the East Front allotment and could be substantially improved. If the AMP as presented in the Preferred Plan is accepted by the operator, significant improvement in this area for grizzly bear would be anticipated. If the operator refuses to participate in this AMP, and BLM decides to fence out the ONAs, habitat in ONAs would improve. But habitat in the larger private land area would probably not be managed by Stiver's recommended guidelines.

Access to ONA boundaries, as proposed, would have an adverse affect on grizzly bears and their habitat and the amount of adversity would probably be in direct proportion to the amount of human use occurring on the route. Bears can be negatively affected in opposite ways, by either being forced to vacate usable and preferable habitat or by using these areas because they have habituated to man, which would make them more likely to be illegally shot or to be subject to controlled removal.

Of the general routes proposed as access to ONA boundaries, BLM is prepared only to initiate formal consultation on the Blind Horse route for the reasons stated at the beginning of this assessment. BLM commits to initiating formal consultation on all other routes when they can be better defined and state-of-the-art analysis tools are available. Generally, increased access on all these routes would negatively affect grizzly bears.

CUMULATIVE EFFECTS ANALYSIS OF THE PROPOSED PUBLIC ACCESS ON THE BLIND HORSE CREEK ROAD

The reviewer is referred to the USFS, 1987, publication on "Cumulative Effects Analysis Process for the RMF Northern Continental Divide Grizzly Bear Ecosystem" for descriptions of the complicated modeling processes and formulas used in the computer assisted analysis. The CEM is composed of two phases: (1) data base construction phase; and (2) the analysis phase. Within the data base construction phase there are two submodels that develop the data base; habitat, and activity. The habitat submodel uses data variables (food, cover, edge value etc.) to arrive at seasonal habitat values for the subunit. The activity submodel creates zones of influence for each activity based on nature and type of activity, disturbance coefficients (DC), cover-noncover relationships and determines the habitat values for the vegetative units within the zone-of-influence. The analysis phase uses results from the data base construction phase as data for formulas that calculate the model results; habitat effectiveness and mortality risk index.

The basic geographic unit of the CEM is the vegetation polygon (individually delineated units of vegetation). The model results calculates values based on the inherent habitat values of polygons as affected by various human activities.

In this presentation, only those activity coefficients (Table A5-1) used in comparing management of 1.8 miles of road (Figure A5-1, Segments A and B) are shown under either private or BLM administration; and a more restrictive monitoring of trail use through the ONA (Segment T) was also calculated. All other roads and trails associated with the Blind Horse ONA retained the same activity and duration of activity coefficients as those originally put in the program for the Birch/Teton BMU. An analysis was made of the Preferred Plan where BLM would institute a spring closure on the Blind Horse Road (Segments A and B).

For analysis purposes, the difference between the No Action Plan (existing) and Preferred Plan were that under the existing private management there would supposedly be no human activity (either by vehicle or by foot) on the Blind Horse Road (Segments A and B) or through the ONA (Segment T) during the spring period. If BLM were to manage the road they would open it during this period which should lower habitat effectiveness and increase the bear mortality risk. BLM would more diligently enforce vehicle restrictions through the ONA during the summer and fall on Segment T which would lower the activity classification from motorized low-use to non-motorized. This should be a benefit to the bear during summer and fall (See Table A5-2).

Model results for Habitat Effectiveness (HE) and Mortality Risk Index (MRI) for both plans are shown in Tables A5-3 and A5-4, respectively. Analysis units shown are for both the Blind Horse Road subunit (six USGS topographic quadrangles which were within six miles of the influence of the road and trail activities) and for the Birch—Teton BMU in its entirety.

As shown on these tables and as anticipated in the initial discussion of this section, a slight reduction in HE is evidenced during the spring if BLM opens the road, but HE increases in the summer and fall due to more intensive restrictions on the trail through the ONA. As also would be expected, should BLM institute a road closure in the spring, the HE would increase (Table A5-3). BLM will institute such a closure in the spring if human use of the road increases to a significant level (daily).

Bear mortality risk would be expected to increase in the spring with no road restrictions; but would slightly decrease in the summer as BLM exercised greater control over vehicles as a result of implementation of the Preferred Plan. However, because MRI coefficients make no differentiation between motorized and non-motorized use (USFS, 1987, p. 19) and only change for high use or low use, programming Segment T from motorized low-use under private management to non-motorized high use during the fall hunting period under BLM management resulted in a slight increase in bear mortality risk.

It became apparent from this initial CEM analysis that an analysis weakness exists for this type of activity. The difference in high-use vs. low-use roads at eight vehicles per/day is not adequate to properly analyze the effects of changes in road management as described in these Plans. That problem might be experienced in other analysis scenarios. Perhaps finer categories should be designed for use in the CEM.

The relative significance of CEM data results for HE and MRI will be hard to interpret until the model has been used a number of times for RMF activities. In this analysis, the data differences were very small. This should indicate minor effects to the bear from increased public access to this ONA boundary.

TABLE A5-1

ACTIVITY CODES AND CLASSIFICATION USED IN THIS ANALYSIS
(highest to least influence)

Code	Activity Group	Criteria
111	Motorized, High Use	$\geq$ 8 vehicles/day
112	Motorized, Low Use	$\leq$ 8 vehicles/day
211	Non-Motorized, High Use	$\geq$ 3 parties/day — Heavy & Extra Heavy on Trail Inventory 300 users/season
212	Non-Motorized, Low Use	$\leq$ 3 parties/day — Low and Moderate on Trail Inventory 300 users/season

TABLE A5-2

ACTIVITY CHANGES ON BLIND HORSE CREEK ROAD AND WITHIN THE ONA AS PROGRAMMED IN THE NO ACTION PLAN AND PROPOSED PLAN

	Type of Activity (Refer to Table)		Duration of Activity	
Road or Trail Seg.	Existing (private management)	Proposed (BLM management)	Existing	Proposed
A	112	112	*07/01-10/15 restricted thru June	*01/01-10/15 12/01-12/31
	111	111	10/16-11/30	10/16-11/30
	112	112	*07/01-10/15	*01/01-10/15
B	111	111	10/16-11/30	10/16-11/30
	112*	211*	*07/01-11/30 motor low use	*10/16-11/30
T&G	212	212	01/01-10/15	01/01-10/15

* Indicates programmed differences in existing and proposed alternatives.

TABLE A5-3

HABITAT EFFECTIVENESS AS MEASURED BY THE CEM FOR PRIVATE (existing situation) VERSUS BLM (proposed) MANAGEMENT OF ROADS ASSOCIATED WITH THE BLIND HORSE ONA

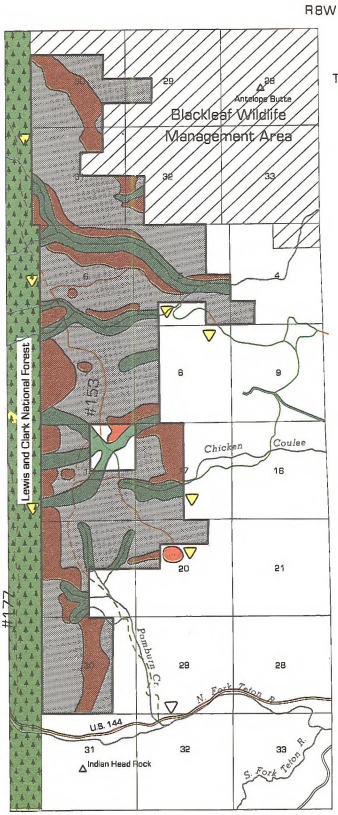
	Blind Horse Road Analysis Sub Unit			Birch Teton BMU Analysis Unit			
	Existing Situation	Proposed Road Management	Difference	Spring Road Closure A & B	Existing	Proposed	Difference
SPRING							
Sub Unit HV	.6538	.6538		.6538	.6435	.6435	
Sub Unit HE	.5511	.5480	Slight Reduction	.5495	.5115	.5106	Slight Reduction
% Reduction	15.6987	16.1802		15.9550	20.5217	20.6513	
SUMMER							
HV	.5139	.5139			.5109	.5109	
HE	.3434	.3456	Slight Increase		.3396	.3419	Slight Increase
% Reduction	33.1704	32.7487			33.5275	33.0791	
HV	.5900	.5900			.5864	.5864	
FALL							
HE	.3448	.3477	Slight Increase		.3098	.3129	Slight Increase
% Reduction	41.5599	41.0780			45.2997	44.7448	

TABLE A5-4

MORTALITY RISK INDEX AS MEASURED BY THE CEM FOR PRIVATE (existing situation) VERSUS BLM (proposed) MANAGEMENT OF ROADS ASSOCIATED WITH THE BLIND HORSE ONA

	Birch / Teton BMU Analysis Unit		
Season	Existing Situation	Proposed Road Management	Difference
Spring	.07715	.07822	+.001 Slight Increase
Summer	.11958	.11748	-.002 Slight Decrease
Fall	.31060	.31192	+.001 Slight Increase

Appendix 6: OFF-ROAD VEHICLES DESIGNATION AND PROJECT AVOIDANCE AREAS



Blind Horse
Outstanding Natural Area

Figure 10. Avoidance Areas and ORV designations.

- ONA Boundary Sign (closed to all motorized vehicles)
- Informational Sign
- ONA Area
- State/Private
- Forest Service
- Riparian Avoidance Area*
- Slope Avoidance Area*
- Private Roads/Trails (need landowner permission)
- Public Roads/Trails

*No developments (including potential powerlines, pipelines, roads and trails resulting from existing mineral leases will be allowed in slope and riparian avoidance areas.

NORTH

0 1 2 Miles
0 1 2 3 Kilometers

1:63,360

#177 — Clary Coulee Trail — USFS

#153 — Mt. Frazier — Chicken Coulee Trail — USFS

Ear Mountain
Outstanding Natural Area

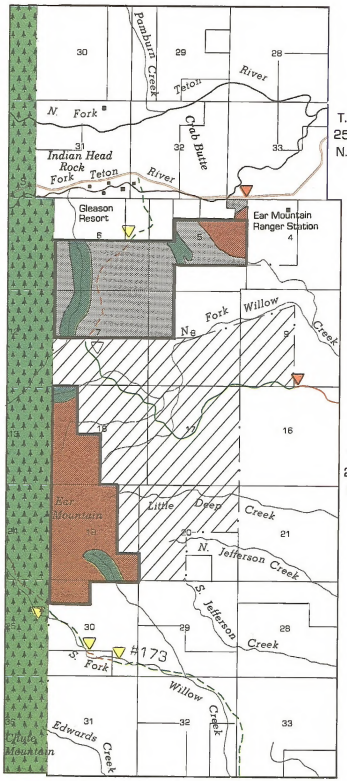


Figure 11. Avoidance Areas and ORV designations.

- ONA Area
- State/Private
- Ear Mountain State Wildlife Management Area
- U.S. Forest Service
- Riparian Avoidance Area*
- Slope Avoidance Area*
- Private Roads/Trails (need landowner permission)
- Public Roads/Trails
- ONA Boundary Sign (closed to all motorized vehicles)
- Public Access Trailhead
- Informational Sign

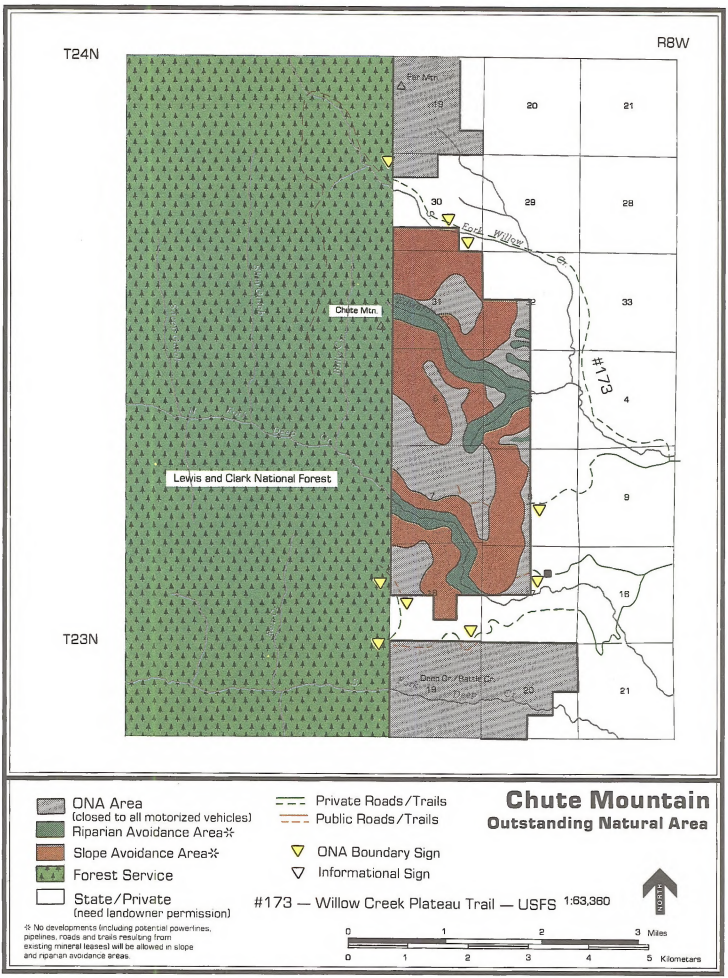
#173 — Willow Creek Plateau Trail USFS

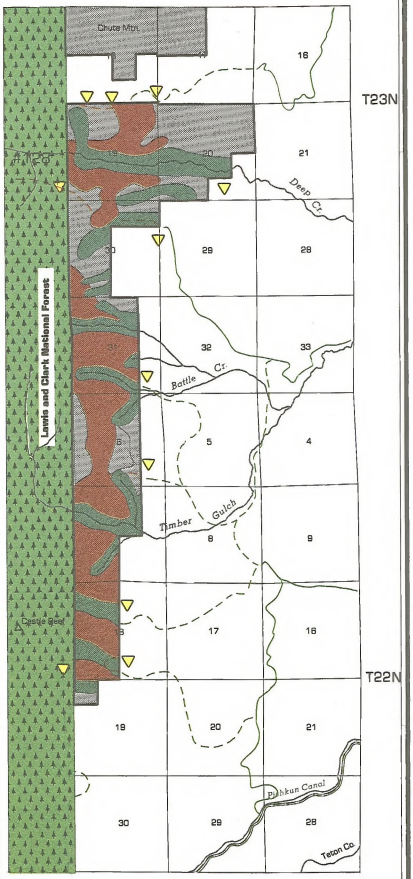
*No developments (including potential powerlines, pipelines, roads and trails resulting from existing mineral leases will be allowed in slope and riparian avoidance areas.

NORTH

0 1 2 Miles
0 1 2 3 Kilometers

Figure 12. Avoidance Areas and ORV designations.





Deep Creek/ Battle Creek

Outstanding Natural Area

Figure 13. Avoidance Areas and ORV designations.

ONA Area

State/Private

Forest Service

Private Roads/Trails (need landowner permission)

Public Roads/Trails

Riparian Avoidance Area※

Slope Avoidance Area※

※ No developments (including potential powerlines, pipelines, roads and trails resulting from existing mineral leases) will be allowed in slope and riparian avoidance areas.

▽ ONA Boundary Sign (closed to all motorized vehicles)

▽ Informational Sign

#128 — Deep Creek — Biggs Creek Trail USFS

NORTH

0 1 2

0 1 2 3

1:63,360

Appendix 7: ACTIVITY PLAN POLICY STATEMENTS AND MANAGEMENT DIRECTION

WILDLIFE AND FISHERIES

Grazing systems will be actively and intensively managed, especially the East Front allotment, to improve important wildlife habitats. Follow the grazing management program for each allotment as described in that section of this Activity Plan. If an upward trend of vegetation is not apparent within two grazing cycles after AMP implementation BLM may exclude cattle from important wildlife habitats, riparian areas important to fisheries and grizzly bears and fescue/grassland benches important as bighorn sheep winter range by fence exclosures of entire area or by fencing out water sources which attract cattle to this important wildlife and fisheries habitats.

Continue intensive grazing management in the Chicken Coulee (Newman) allotment. Refer to the Range (Livestock) section in this AP for details.

Establish access to eastern ONA boundaries for all ONAs and allow walk-in hunting so that proper game management (regulated harvest) can occur and that the general public can use the wildlife resources.

Allow seismic exploration in ONAs with strict adherence to the RMF Wildlife Guidelines. Be especially careful concerning use of helicopters (e.g, flight paths, above-ground heights, and 9-mile spacing).

RECREATION

Public overnight camping will be permitted on BLM-administered land within the ONAs except at the Ear Mountain Trailhead.

Camping restrictions for future trailhead developments will be determined on an individual basis.

Visitors will be advised to follow good bear management practices when camping or hiking in the ONAs.

All access points will be posted with Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife, and Parks bear management signs.

Use of off-road vehicles in the ONAs will comply with stipulations listed under Administrative Access.

ORV barriers will be installed at ONA boundaries to exclude motorized vehicles from existing roads, vehicle ways, and trails .

Non-motorized travel on trails may be restricted during early spring thaw to avoid damage to wet and soft ground.

Authorized vehicle travel will be restricted to designated roads and trails.

VRM contrast ratings will be completed for all proposed projects in the ONAs.

RANGE-LIVESTOCK

The Preferred Plan limits class of livestock in the ONAs to cattle and horses. Grazing sheep and/or goats in the ONAS would not be allowed because of the grizzly bear habitat requirements. The livestock class policy would follow the guidelines recommended by Interagency Grizzly Bear Committee Guidelines, the Grizzly Bear Recovery Plan, and the Rocky Mountain Front Guidelines (also interagency).

Administrative and livestock operator use of designated vehicle trails will be allowed to monitor rangeland, inspect livestock and to provide maintenance to range improvements or construct range improvements (applies to Blind Horse ONA; Chicken Coulee Allotment and Deep Creek-Battle Creek ONA; East Front allotment).

A maximum grazing period will not begin prior to July 1 and not extend beyond October 10.

Range developments will not conflict with wildlife habitat objectives or impair the natural area visual character, and will be designed to improve all resource objectives.

Integrated Pest Management using biological agents including insects will be used when possible.

Moderate livestock grazing use (up to 60%) on suitable rangeland will be allowable. Pasture rotation, season restrictions and herding will be used to obtain moderate utilization levels on ONA allotments.

CULTURAL

In accordance with federal regulation and BLM policy, cultural resource inventories will be required in advance of all surface disturbing activities. If cultural resources are identified, they must be recorded and evaluated under the criteria of eligibility for the National Register of Historic Places. If cultural resources are found to be eligible, the impacts from surface disturbing activities must be avoided or mitigated. The process of evaluation and determination of effect requires consultation and coordination with the Montana State Historic Preservation Officer and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation.

AIR QUALITY

Prescribed burns will be done in coordination with the Montana State Airshed Coordinator.

Dust abatement and traffic control requirements may be necessary to minimize particulate matter in the air should any of the "Grandfathered" oil and gas leases within the Blind Horse ONA boundaries be developed.

Should any of the "grandfathered" oil and gas leases within the Blind Horse ONA boundaries be developed, venting and flaring of the wells will not be allowed if not economically justified or if in violation of state or federal air quality standards.

Vapor recovery units will be required to reduce noxious odors should oil-gas production facilities be placed adjacent to an ONA boundary.

OIL-GAS, AND MINERALS

OIL-GAS

Oil and gas leases will utilize the guidance of the HRMP and the Ear Mountain addition amendment.

Seismic notices will be reviewed on an individual basis and will receive stipulations based on the Rocky Mountain Front Wildlife Guidelines. Valid existing lease rights will be allowed.

LOCATABLE MINERALS

Public lands within the ONAs will remain open to mineral entry per the HRMP. There are no mining claims within the ONAs. Should a claim be staked, a plan of operations would be required on all activities (43 CFR 3809.1-4(b)3), except casual use (as defined in 43 CFR 3809.1-2). "Operations" includes all activity associated with exploration, assessment work, development and processing of mineral deposits located under the mining laws.

To ensure adequate rehabilitation, bonding will be required on all operations, except for casual use.

Rehabilitation measures of a disturbed site will consider replacement of wildlife food and cover.

Timing restrictions will be applied to mining operations on an individual basis to accommodate mining operations and to prevent unnecessary and undue degradation while protecting important wildlife habitat.

Mining operations located in crucial wildlife habitat may be required to rehabilitate his previous disturbances prior to initiating new surface disturbing activities. This action would enhance the ability of mining operations to continue while rehabilitating wildlife habitat at the earliest time.

MINERAL MATERIALS

There will be no common variety (saleable) mineral removal allowed within the ONAs.

LANDS

All BLM-administered land would be retained in federal ownership. Land acquisition would be on a "willing seller basis." ONAs would be avoidance areas for rights-of-way, leases and permits which require development or disturbance. A minimum of one public access will be acquired for each ONA.

No communications site rights-of-way will be allowed within the ONAs.

WATERSHED

Actively and intensively manage livestock grazing to improve vegetative cover throughout the watershed on all ONAs. Use monitoring techniques outlined in Range-Livestock to determine an upward trend in vegetative cover. If improvement is not apparent within two grazing cycles after AMP implementation BLM may consider a different grazing method or exclude livestock by fencing.

Intensively manage riparian area adjoining the South Fork of Deep Creek to improve streambank vegetation and stability by implementation of an AMP which may include fencing, alternate water development, and other measures.

Continue to actively pursue water rights on all water sources in the ONAs.

Ensure that oil and gas activities for valid existing leases as well as any other surface disturbing activities around water sources adhere to state and federal regulations.

SOILS

The Garlet, Loberg, Starman,and Whitore series of Upland Woodlands will be avoided by all disturbance activities. Water erosion hazard is severe or very severe on these soils if vegetation is removed due to their dominantly steep and very steep slopes and relatively thin topsoil.

The wetland sites and riparian drainages will be avoided for all land disturbances, except for critical locations where trails or roads cross. Location of these crossings shall be selected by an interdisciplinary team consisting of a wildlife biologist, hydrologist, engineer, and soil scientist.

Land disturbances shall be limited on foothills grasslands. Avoidance areas for roads, trails, and other disturbances are where slopes exceed 25% for more than 250 feet in length.

NOXIOUS PLANTS

The BLM will implement the Integrated Pest Management (IPM) program to reduce or eradicate noxious plants in the ONAs with emphasis on biological control. Herbicides, mechanical or manual methods could be used under the IPM program along roads, trails, and on small upland infestations to contain or eradicate specific noxious plants on BLM-administered areas. The biological agents approach is the preferred method, however, chemicals or mechanical control efforts may be applied if biological agents are unavailable, or size of infestations (small, isolated) makes biological agents impractical.

FIRE

Wildfires: Use appropriate suppression action in ONAs, use heavy equipment only when necessary to prevent spread to adjacent private landowners. Normal suppression techniques will include pumper trucks and hand-line construction crew. Air attacks are permissible if fires escape initial attack and appear to be threatening adjacent lands. Locate fire camps and associated facilities outside the ONAs.

Prescribed Burns: Specific areas where prescribed burns can improve vegetation condition have yet to be inventoried and prioritized. Complete this step by 1990. Areas where prescribed burning can benefit range condition and wildlife habitat include: (a) Rough fescue and/or Idaho fescue grassland benches where a majority of fescue plants have become "wolfy." Highest priority of burning given to those benches important as bighorn sheep and elk winter range, (b) Decadent aspen groves in need of regeneration for wildlife.

ADMINISTRATIVE ACCESS

The ONAs are closed to all forms of motorized vehicles. Administrative vehicular access will be allowed agency personnel for project and range allotment monitoring, and resource use evaluations. This administrative access is restricted to designated roads and trails only.

Livestock permittees will be allowed administrative access on a permit basis to administer their livestock lease (to include but not limited to: spring, pipeline, and fence maintenance, salt dispersal, livestock inspection and veterinarian care). This access is limited to designated roads/trails only and is subject to any stipulations imposed by the agency. Cross-country travel will not be authorized.

Seismic activity conducted by ground-traveling motorized vehicles will be allowed access on a permitted basis, limited to to designated roads/trails and subject to stipulations imposed by the agency. Cross-country motorized travel for seismic exploration will not be permitted.

Supplement 1: WOODLANDS, RIPARIAN, WETLANDS, AND GRASSLAND SOIL SERIES DESCRIPTIONS

UPLAND WOODLAND COMMUNITIES SOIL DESCRIPTION

These areas are dominated by one or more of the following trees: Douglas-fir, limber pine, lodgepole pine, subalpine fir, and Engelmann spruce. The understory usually contains grass, forbs, and shrubs and small grassland parks.

The soils range from very shallow soils near rock outcrops and on convex ridges to shallow and moderately deep soils on slopes of hills. These well-drained loamy and clayey soils generally have more than 35% rock fragments throughout.

Slopes range from about 8 to more than 60%.

The major upland woodland soils are: Garlet, Loberg, Starman, and Whitore series.

Garlet, Loberg and Whitore are deep soils on mountain sideslopes; whereas the Starman soils are on convex slopes and along ridge crests adjacent to rock outcrops. The Starman soils are shallow (10-20 inches) over limestone or sandstone. Douglas-fir and limber pine are the common trees.

RIPARIAN AND WETLAND SOIL DESCRIPTIONS

These areas consist primarily of American sloughgrass, Columbia needlegrass, mannagrass, tall reedgrass, and other sedges and rushes. Major forbs are penstemon and Ranunculus spp. Shrubs include chokecherry, dogwood, cinquefoil, willow, and aspen.

Soils range from moderately well-drained to poorly-drained, deep, loam soils with sandy and gravelly soils along drainage coarses.

Slopes are mainly 1-4% with meandering stream channels across the floodplain areas. The water erosion hazard is slight when good vegetation ground cover is maintained.

The dominant soil occurring in the riparian areas is the Gallatin series. Depth to seasonal highwater table ranges from 36-60 inches.

The calcareous piedmont glacial till landscapes have small depressions (potholes) that accumulate runoff water from adjacent areas. There are also wet slumps on slopes of the mountains that support wetland vegetation. Springs occur in some of the slumps.

The amount of water in the "potholes" and slump areas varies as the precipitation and recharge increases or decreases based on intensity and duration of storms.

FOOTHILL GRASSLANDS

These communities consist primarily of a fescue/wheatgrass habitat type. Major forbs are: lupine, phlox, penstemon, larkspur, and western yarrow. Major shrubs are: shrubby cinquefoil, rose, and snowberry.

The associated soils are dominately moderately deep and deep (20 to 60 inches) with loamy textures. The percent rock fragments throughout the profiles varies from 5 to more than 35%. The soils are mostly well-drained, however, small depressed areas or areas on concave slopes may be somewhat poorly drained and wet for significant periods.

Slopes range from about 8 to 45%. As slope increases, and vegetation decreases, water erosion hazard increases from slight to very severe.

The major soils of the foothills grasslands are: Adel, Babb, Bynum, Cheadle, Dogby, Fifer, Hanson, Mord, Raynesford, Redchiefs, Starley, Starman, Shedhorn, Teton, and Tibson series. For detailed soil descriptions and interpretations for specific sites or landscapes contact: BLM field offices at Great Falls or Lewistown; or the Soil Conservation Service, Choteau, Montana.

Supplement 2: PUBLIC CRITIQUE OF ONA ACTIVITY PLAN ISSUES AND BLM RESPONSES

All public comments received on the proposed AP from the two public meetings (Great Falls and Choteau) and from individual letters have been categorized below. The categories are the six issues identified by the Team. No other issues were identified by the public either as personal responses or by comment at the public meetings. Responses to individual or group comments of like nature are prepared to acknowledge all comments.

LEGAL AND PHYSICAL PUBLIC ACCESS TO BLIND HORSE, DEEP CREEK AND CHUTE MOUNTAIN ONAS

What level of public access is appropriate in keeping with those outstanding natural values (Montana Wilderness Association)?

No access points are required (for Blind Horse) as hiking access exists from the south at Indian Head Rock trailhead, and from the north through the Blackleaf Game Range (Glacier/Two Medicine Alliance).

Access is important, for hiking, etc. (Ray Williams).

No access helps preserve wildlife (Ken Siney).

Access would destroy hunting guide business and destroy fragile area. It would encourage horses and numerous foot hunters (Dick Klick).

In 1965 there were about 2,000 mule deer on the ONA areas, today there are about 150. This is due to uncontrolled public access during hunting season (Al Hass).

Results of increased public access will be to cut hunting season to 3 weeks. Over-exploitation is the problem (Al Hass).

Non-accessibility is what makes it great country. The narrow band of ONAs won't take the proposed public pressure (Dick Klick).

Does BLM allow E. Newman access to his private 160 acres in the Blind Horse ONA?

The Ear Mountain ONA is open enough that internal trail development should not be necessary.

Apparently some confusion exists as to whether there is a public right-of-way across the Salmond ranch into the Chute Mountain ONA. This should be checked with the Teton County Commissioners.

RESPONSE

Montana BLM will pursue access acquisition on a prioritized basis. Currently, there is no legal or physical access to the Blind Horse, Chute Mountain and Deep Creek—Battle Creek ONA from the east. As a result these areas are enjoyed exclusively by the adjacent landowners bounding the ONAs eastern borders. The BLM believes that since these lands are public lands, they should be accessible to all publics.

Instruction Memorandum MT-88-117, Montana Mission Statement from the White Paper on Access states: "the BLM will capitalize, when appropriate, on easements acquisition for in-place roads constructed for other uses, and will actively and accurately disseminate existing and updated information on public lands access opportunities via maps and signing of the BLM road net. Access will be conscientiously managed to ensure multiple-use goals. Achievement of these objectives will occur through balanced use of exchanges, rights-of-way acquisition, grants, cooperative public/private management programs, or any other process that works."

Access is defined as the physical ability to reach a particular place or area or the permission to do so. For the public to legally have access to public land, it must have both a physical way to get there and permission. The BLM must obtain easements for the type of physical access needed.

For the purposes of this Activity Plan, access is needed only to the boundaries of the ONAs. The ONAs are closed to all motorized equipment, including vehicles, so interior motorized access is not permissible. The BLM goal is to get the public to the boundary, establish parking areas, and allow them to enjoy these areas on foot/horseback.

TO WHAT EXTENT SHOULD SEISMIC EXPLORATION BE ALLOWED IN THE ONAS?

Consider whether any oil and gas exploration should be allowed prior to a decision on wilderness by Congress (Montana Wilderness Association)?

No seismic or oil/gas exploration should be allowed (Glacier/Two Medicine Alliance).

Seismic exploration should definitely be allowed in the ONAs (W. M. Vaughey).

We believe the Bureau should permit seismic activities to occur within the ONAs (Exxon).

Would prefer not to see any or at least reduce number of seismic (actions). Minimize all geo-type exploration with wildlife as primary concern. Impacts on wildlife from seismic testing goats and sheep (Ken Sinay).

Would BLM allow exploration on areas with No Lease?

Why would anyone want to do seismic if they can't drill in there (ONAs) (Doug Ablin)?

The RMF ONAs are important grizzly bear use areas. Any seismic activity should be carried out in such a way to avoid conflicts with grizzly bear and other wildlife use. Seasonality of seismic activity should be controlled and closely monitored (TNC).

We strongly support continued seismic activity in the front range area in order to fully ascertain the degree of oil-gas potential for future exploration purposes (Texaco).

RESPONSE

There are various concerns and questions relating to the issue of seismic exploration in the outstanding natural areas. The Headwaters RMP/EIS does not adequately address seismic exploration in these areas. Since the Final RMP/EIS was released in 1983 and the Record of Decision in 1984, the BLM has allowed some seismic exploration in the ONAs. This activity was done by helicopters and porta-drills and surface blasting.

Seismic activity has been allowed in the past with some stringent stipulations attached to the project, i.e., timing windows, minimum spacing distances between concurrent lines, minimum altitudes of aircraft, etc. (see Interagency Rocky Mountain Front Wildlife Guidelines). Because there is no specific guidance in the Headwaters RMP/EIS, we have been addressing seismic activity on a case-by-case basis.

This Activity Plan will address seismic proposals in a specific manner and address general and specific guidance to be applied to seismic operations in the ONAs. The question is not whether or not seismic activity will be allowed, but how the BLM can permit seismic activity with the least disruptions to scenic and surface values present in the ONAs. Seismic can only be considered within the context of non-motorized actions in that the HRMP closed the ONAs to motorized equipment. We intend this Activity Plan to provide clear guidance for an oil-gas operator to follow, allowing the seismic exploration while maintaining the environmental values characteristic of these ONAs.

WHAT TYPE OF RESOURCE DEVELOPMENTS SHOULD BE ALLOWED WITHIN THE ONAS?

Too much human development tends to screw things up (Ken Sinay).

No garbage areas (should be allowed) (Ken Sinay).

No highly developed sites (are recommended) (Ken Sinay).

In order to preserve the primitive qualities, no trail (internal) development would be desirable (Glacier/Two Medicine Alliance).

Any improvements that adversely affect the natural values of these ONAs should not be permitted. The reasons these ONAs were created should be held foremost in the consideration of any planned activities. Firewood harvest should be prohibited (TNC).

RESPONSE

The various public comments received on this issue cumulatively recommend that no garbage collection points, no internal trail development, or any improvements that adversely affect the ONAs wildland values (wildlife, scenic, recreation) for which they were designated should be allowed. The development of livestock control facilities are examples of "improvements" which may or may not be contrary to the ONA objectives. This Activity Plan will identify and resolve conflicting resource uses while tempering the end products with the RMP direction (the ONAs are) "to be managed essentially as wilderness."

These public opinions correlate with the ONA objectives identified in the Headwaters RMP (1984), and agree with the BLM resource management objectives to retain the wildland values that make these Outstanding Natural Areas by not allowing degrading activities.

SHOULD OVERNIGHT CAMPING BE ALLOWED ON THE ONAS?

Overnight camping and hiking should be allowed (Glacier/Two Medicine Alliance).

Would prefer to see no camping facilities (Ken Sinay).

Don't think you are going to get any day-use. How would you be able to enforce it and stop them (Re: overnight camping) (Dick Klick)?

Recreational day use would be preferable because of the low impact it would have on the areas.

If overnight camping is allowed it should stress minimum impact methods (no fires, no disturbance of vegetation).

Horse camps should be prohibited (TNC).

RESPONSE:

The four ONAs are relatively small in comparison to other adjacent public areas, and are separate federal wildland units adjacent to Forest Service and private land with high value resources. Recreation day-use only may be desirable and necessary for some parts of the ONAs. Areas that are sensitive wildlife habitats (prime spring reproduction areas, critical winter ranges). Selected ONA resources and locations can not accommodate frequent or extended human use. Examples are: streamside environs, springs, riparian stringers, seasonal wildlife reproduction habitats, raptor nesting territories, meadows, thin/fragile soils, slopes over 10 percent (roads, trails), etc. Extended human use or intrusion of such areas is incompatible with the critical wildland values for which these ONAs were established.

Overnight camping is a necessity for the use of some ONA areas. It produces products of human recreation use such as garbage, exclusion/displacement of wildlife populations, increased risk of wildfire, increased devegetation of frequently-used sites, and increased potential for water pollution.

Management (enforcement) can be achieved through public information (signs, literature) distribution, and agency staff contact with the user public. These activities are expected to provide the essential public use management of the ONAs, permit overnight camping on selected ONA areas, and retain/improve the ONA resource values

In summary, the AP has identified environs limited to day-use and those which can accommodate overnight camping. These will be monitored and evaluated to assure continuation of ONA values or improvement thereof.

HOW WILL NOXIOUS PLANTS BE CONTROLLED?

Weed control is very important (Ray Williams).

Does BLM have finances available to address noxious plants problems?

The weed control portion of the Activity Plan should stress inventory, prevention, and a true Integrated Pest Management approach. Chemical control should be used only when other methods have proven ineffective. If chemical control is necessary, hand application directly to target species should be the method used. Should small areas of infestation be discovered, efforts should be geared toward eradication (TNC).

RESPONSE:

BLM has a legal responsibility under current policy to administer some degree of noxious plants control/eradication either independently or in cooperation with various county or state agencies. Noxious plants on the ONAs are of considerable concern to BLM, and will be addressed as an issue in this Activity Plan with the objective of identifying noxious plant problems areas and a program of control/eradication.

HOW TO CONTROL WILDFIRE? SHOULD PRESCRIBED FIRE BE PERMITTED FOR WILDLIFE HABITAT AND LIVESTOCK FORAGE IMPROVEMENT?

Wildfires should be allowed to burn as long as they do not threaten adjoining private land and are compatible with ONA management guidelines (TNC).

Prescribed fire is a valuable management tool and should be used where appropriate to achieve ONA management objectives (TNC).

RESPONSE:

The BLM will continue to provide fire control during the first burning period of all wildfires on or threatening public land until the 1978 Normal Fire Year Plan is updated (Headwaters RMP/EIS, 1983, Final).

Under current agreement, the US Forest Service has fire control responsibility in the area.

Modified suppression areas may be established when the Normal Fire Year Plan is reviewed, based on consideration of the following criteria: values at risk; fire behavior; fire occurrence; beneficial fire effects; fire suppression costs; and consistency with other agency plans, and policies.

This Activity Plan will provide the BLM with specific guidance to be incorporated into the updated Fire Plan (late 1988/early 1989). Current guidance allows for the use of heavy equipment for fire suppression. The updated Fire Plan may or may not continue with this policy.

Specific guidance may or may not include "let burn" areas. This may include initial attack on wildfire, however, aggressive control may not be taken unless there is threat to loss of private property.

Prescribed burning may continue to be used in support of resource management objectives, such as range improvement. It will not be used to improve one resource at the expense of another. For example, prescribed burning on rangeland would be designed to achieve both wildlife and range objectives. Soil, vegetation, water quality and quantity, recreation, and scenic values and data will be evaluated prior to any prescribed burning to assure that the effort results in wildland resources enhancement.

Prescribed fire would not be permitted in habitat for threatened and endangered species (plant and animal) that would jeopardize the continued existence of such species. It may be possible to enhance T&E species habitat with prescribed burning.

Fire management planning and fire suppression will be coordinated with federal, state, and county fire suppression agencies.

NO-LEASE OF CENTER CORE AREAS OF THE ONAS

Although this subject has adequate management direction from the HRMP, the BLM received several letters from the oil-gas industry concerned with this policy. We felt BLM needed to respond to their proposition that we reconsider leasing the No-Lease core areas through designation as No Surface Occupancy (NSO).

The Headwaters RMP/EIS provides guidance for attaching special stipulations to leases at the time of issuance to protect seasonal wildlife habitat and/or other sensitive resource values. In highly sensitive areas, where special stipulations are not sufficient to protect important surface resource values NSO stipulations can be attached to the lease (page 13, HRMP, Final).

The four ONAs along the RMF are considered highly sensitive areas based on their wildlife, scenic and recreational values (page 7, HRMP, Final). The effects of ONA designation are similar to the effects of wilderness designation; however, this designation provides less secure protection because it is an administrative decision, not legislative.

Based on this guidance in the HRMP, the NSO stipulation has been attached to the outer borders of the ONAs. The BLM could have made, based on resource values, the entire ONAs NSO. However, based on the premise that oil-gas resources over a half-mile from a drill site probably can not be drained, the BLM felt it was prudent to not lease the cores of the ONAs, thereby not leasing an area a lease-holder could not "enjoy."

For the BLM to change this policy would require a planning amendment to the RMP. At this stage in our planning process, we are only preparing an Activity Plan based on the general guidance in the RMP. Consequently a planning amendment is not appropriate at this time. However, when the RMP cycles for maintenance or amendment, this issue may be re-evaluated.

COMMENTS BELOW ARE NOT IDENTIFIED WITH ANY OF THE ABOVE ISSUES

The listed areas should not become wilderness (Ray Williams).

Should be guarded (excluded?) as far as powerlines, pipelines, and dwellings (Ray Williams).

Since all the ONAs are in prime wild game areas and joining Fish and Game wildlife reserves, it seems they should all be given wilderness status (Alice Gleason).

How will management of the Rocky Mountain Front ONAs aid in the recovery of threatened and endangered species (Mont. Wild. Assoc.)?

We believe that the outstanding wilderness qualities of the Blind Horse ONA should be protected and maintained intact (Glacier/Two Med. Alliance).

ORVs should be prohibited in this area (Glacier/Two Medicine Alliance).

Ear Mountain itself is a sacred area to the Blackfeet Indians (Glacier/Two Medicine Alliance).

We encourage you to recommend wilderness for all of the BLM ONAs on the Front (Glacier/Two Medicine Alliance).

Development of the petroleum potential by the drilling of wildcat tests and the production of any oil and gas intercepted should be allowed within the ONAs (W. M. Vaughey).

We feel it may be appropriate for the BLM to re-evaluate the Headwater RMPs no-lease recommendation for the central portions of the ONAs in favor of offering leases, even if they are no surface occupancy leases (Exxon).

We are concerned about these areas being buffer zones around the FS Wilderness Areas (Albert Carlson).

Can anyone nominate an ACEC or ONA at any time (Dick Klick)?

We are concerned that access is needed for essential county services such as ambulance or fire (Albert Carlson).

Would BLM allow a road through the ONA specifically between T. 8 and 9 N. (George Hodgekiss)?

If the FS wants to cross the BLM (ONAs) to drill a well on FS lands, would BLM let them (Doug Abeline).

Can we (BLM) modify our NSO so only a wellhead could be in there with remote monitoring outside the ONAs (Dave Neibauer)?

What would BLM do if someone got production in an area off the ONAs, and wanted to unitize the oil and gas development to include the ONAs, thereby allowing full field development? Burger gave potential answer.

What is the BLM policy of oil-gas leasing on adjacent private land?

Will oil-gas leases in the ONA core areas be reoffered upon expiration? No (Dave Neibauer).

Who or why can BLM dictate action on private land (Dick Klick)? NEPA and courts require that federal actions on split estate be treated as though it is entirely federal.

Wilderness groups are supportive of the ONA proposals (Dick Klick).

It is important that this Activity Plan be objective (issue) driven and that any proposed activities within the ONAs be analyzed in relation to these objectives.

Any proposed activities that will have an effect on the natural values of these ONAs should go through the Environmental Assessment process.

The potential effects of the Activity Plan on endangered and threatened species should be evaluated (USFWS).

The special designation (ONA) of acquired public lands should benefit listed species in the long-term (USFWS).

To assist you (BLM) in coordinating multiple-use activities that minimize or avoid adverse effects to various wildlife species we recommend applying the guidelines developed under The Interagency Rocky Mountain Front Monitoring and Evaluation Program (USFWS).

We believe it is critical that the BLM allow access to these four ONAs for purposes of oil and gas exploration and development opportunities, particularly in light of the dwindling land available for such uses (RMOGA).

We strongly urge BLM to continue leasing the lands contained in the ONAs with reasonable lease stipulations which still allow surface occupancy (RMOGA).

We recommend that the BLM apply the minimum legal standards for protection of these areas which will adequately safeguard sensitive resource values while allowing industry the opportunity to explore for, and possibly develop, oil and gas resources (RMOGA).

We do not believe it is necessary to withhold portions of the ONAs from oil-gas leasing or seismic activities because the BLM has at its disposal numerous mitigation measures which will provide for adequate protection of the existing resource values (RMOGA).

Texaco believes that this entire front range area should be managed for "multiple use" including oil and gas development (Texaco).

It is extremely important that public lands which are not designated wilderness, continue to remain open to oil and gas exploration (Texaco).

If BLM finds it absolutely necessary and justified to use NSOs we believe that a procedure should be established by the BLM for waiving these stipulations in specific cases and in limited geographical areas with high oil-gas potential.

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PUBLIC PARTICIPATION-COORDINATION

About 73 copies of the Coordinated Activity Plan proposal and associated data were sent as an informational brochure to various conservation groups, public agencies, private industry, and private citizens on February 3, 1988. A meeting was held with Teton County Commission staff and some commissioners February 11, 1988. The purpose was to apprise the Commission of the Activity Plan objectives, and to hear the Commission's views and concerns, if any.

Two public information dissemination and opinion collection meetings were held February 23 and 24, 1988, at Great Falls, and Choteau respectively. About 40 private citizens and public agency personnel were in attendance. Comments, oral and written, were received and can be found in Supplement 2 of this AP.

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OUTSTANDING NATURAL AREAS OF THE Rocky Mountain Front Range

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

For The Coordinated Activity Plan

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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this Environmental Assessment (EA) is to analyze the Activity Plan (AP) management prescriptions for the Outstanding Natural Areas (ONAs) designated by the Headwaters Resource Management Plan (1984) (HRMP). The four ONAs, totalling 13,087 acres, are analyzed in this EA.

It would be to the reader's convenience to refer to the two activity plans (No Action and Preferred) presented in the previous section for more specific information and discussion than is presented in this EA. This has been done to preclude repetitive text and to assist the reader to become better informed about the natural resources of these ONAs and their prospective public management.

This EA was prepared by the staff of the Lewistown BLM District, Airport Road, Lewistown, Montana and the Great Falls BLM Resource Area, P.O. Box 2865, Great Falls, Montana. The interdisciplinary team composition is presented at the end of this EA.

PURPOSE AND NEED FOR THE PROPOSED ACTION

It is the purpose of this Activity Plan/EA to design concise policy and resource management direction for these ONAs which will protect, conserve, and enhance their varied natural resources.

The HRMP provided broad management direction and policy for the ONAs. However, an activity plan is required before some of the objectives, and many of the methods and policies necessary to properly manage these important wildland resources can be undertaken or established.

Specifically, intensive management should occur on the abused areas along the South Fork of Deep Creek to improve streambank stability and vegetation, thereby improving fisheries habitat and water quality. Implementation of intensive grazing management practices, including development of livestock facilities and forage improvement on the Deep Creek-Battle Creek and Chute Mountain ONAs, should be a priority.

Riparian areas important to grizzly bear, and fescue/grassland benches important to bighorn sheep should be significantly improved.

The public does not have legal access to three of the four ONAs from the east. Legal access does exist from the west through the Lewis and Clark National Forest at two locations, but these require a long and difficult effort to reach the ONAs.

There is a need to improve and/or maintain current vegetative cover on all ONA watersheds. Increased native vegetation would result in: (1) decreased runoff, erosion, and sedimentation; (2) increased infiltration, shallow ground water storage, and soil moisture; (3) improved wildlife habitat including nesting and escape cover, forage, and resting areas; and (4) prolonged stream flow, reduced flood peaks, improved fisheries habitat, and improved water quality. All vegetation increases due to enhancement practices or climatic influences would be dedicated to watershed and wildlife; no increases would go to livestock.

The purpose of the cultural resource management prescriptions are to provide protection for archaeological, historical, and paleontological resources for future scientific use and public enjoyment. Cultural resources are fragile, nonrenewable, and ever dwindling in quality and quantity across the nation. Their protection is mandated by the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (as amended) and associated federal regulations.

The four ONAs are currently designated Class II air quality areas, pursuant to the 1970 Clean Air Act and the Montana State Air Quality Bureau. The air quality of these ONAs is considered very good with little degradation due to human or industrial sources. It is the purpose of this Activity Plan to design policy direction to maintain this Class II designation in light of the human disturbances that may occur on these ONAs.

The BLM needs to protect and conserve the resources that were a driving force in designating these areas as Outstanding Natural Areas.

LOCATION OF THIS ACTION

The four ONAs are located approximately 19 miles west of Choteau, Montana and adjoin the Lewis and Clark National Forest on the west. Please refer to the Activity Plan, Location and Setting section for more specific information.

ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES

ISSUES

No legal/physical public access to the Deep Creek-Battle Creek, Chute Mountain, and Blind Horse ONAs.

Seismic exploration activities in the ONAs.

Resource developments in the ONAs.

Overnight camping in the ONAs.

Noxious plants control.

Control of wildfire, use of prescribed burns, and fuel management.

For more detailed information please refer to the Identification of Major Issues section of the Activity Plan.

OPPORTUNITIES

Provide public access to enhance recreational opportunities on public land presently unavailable due to lack of legal access.

Continue to acquire lands adjacent to the ONAs with the same significant resource values forming larger blocks of public land for improved management effectiveness.

PROCESS USED TO FORMULATE ALTERNATIVES

Both the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) regulations and the BLM resource management planning regulations require the formulation of alternatives to the proposed action. Each alternative represents a complete and reasonable plan to guide the future management of these public lands and resources. The No Action Alternative is interpreted as continuation of present levels or systems of resource use or production. The Preferred Alternative is to provide resource protection and/or development.

The alternatives considered in this analysis were determined by the following criteria:

Alternatives would assume the oil-gas leasing and development direction given in the Headwaters RMP to be the minimum level of protection for the surface resources.

Alternatives would provide for threatened and endangered species (plant and animal) habitat protection at a level sufficient to meet the requirements of the Endangered Species Act.

Alternatives would provide protection for other existing surface resources including other wildlife resources, and scenic and other outdoor recreation values by maintaining or enhancing these ONAs through management as prescribed in the AP.

Alternatives would provide for non-motorized public access such as hiking and horseback riding. Motorized vehicles will be regulated through ORV implementation of the ORV designation.

DESCRIPTIONS OF NO ACTION AND PREFERRED ALTERNATIVES

NO ACTION ALTERNATIVE

WILDLIFE AND FISHERIES

Wildlife management along the Rocky Mountain Front and on the ONAs has mainly been reactive to influences from negative human intrusions created by other BLM actions (e.g., oil-gas exploration and development). To lessen these negative influences a number of plans and agreements have been or are applicable including: mitigation found in the HRMP; the Interagency Grizzly Bear Committee Guidelines, the RMF Wildlife Guidelines, as well as the Grizzly Bear and Gray Wolf Recovery Plans.

The current grazing management practices benefit wildlife by improving habitat conditions in the Blind Horse ONA, but fail to meet wildlife objectives in the Deep Creek-Battle Creek and Chute Mountain ONAs.

Legal access from the east does not exist to any ONA except Ear Mountain. Hunting in these areas has been very limited as a result.

RECREATION

The four ONAs are areas of high natural resource values, and "are to be managed essentially as wilderness" according to the HRMP. This requires specific restrictions on many consumptive activities, either by limiting their impacts or total excludsion of such actions.

Recreation would be permitted without evaluation and support facilities or agency actions.

RANGE-LIVESTOCK

This alternative precludes the livestock management actions discussed in the HRMP (such as grazing systems and range improvements) upon which allotment improvement potential is dependent.

Livestock intensive management agreements would not be pursued except in the Chicken Coulee allotment where an intensive management plan exists. Grazing under the No Action Alternative would continue under the present allotted grazing preference for all six ONA leases. Custodial grazing leases would be issued and monitored on a regularly scheduled basis. Table EA-1 shows how these allotments would be recategorized.

Livestock grazing leases would continue at current levels in riparian areas and adjacent steep slopes. Livestock grazing fails to meet wildlife habitat and species objectives in the Deep Creek-Battle Creek ONA.

TABLE EA-1

LIVESTOCK GRAZING LEASES RECATEGORIZATION

Allotment	RMP Category	No Action Category
Chicken Coulee	I (improve)	I (improve)
East Front	I (improve)	C* (custodial)
Green Timber	I (improve)	C* (custodial)
Cow Track	M (maintain)	M (maintain)
Ear Mountain	M (maintain)	M (maintain)
McCarthy Individual	C (custodial)	C (custodial)

* Recategorized because of unachievable management and economical investment opportunities.

CULTURAL AND HISTORIC

Cultural resource inventories would be required in advance of all surface disturbing activities and any identified sites recorded, evaluated, avoided, or mitigated.

AIR QUALITY

The No Action Alternative would allow particulate matter to increase to the maximum levels allowable for a Class II airshed. The alternative allows the use of dust abatement procedures (daily road watering, resin road surfaces, etc.) and traffic control requirements associated with surface disturbances in the ONAs. These requirements would apply specifically to potential road, drill pad and pipeline construction associated with oil and gas exploration and production on those leases in the Blind Horse ONA with valid existing rights (held by production by the adjacent Blackleaf Unit or in suspension because of the Blackleaf EIS). Flaring and venting may or may not be allowed, dependent on economic justification and state-federal air quality standards.

Prescribed burning would be done in coordination with the State Airshed Coordinator.

MINERALS

Restrictions on seismic actions and administrative vehicle use are limited. Seismic actions would be permitted on a limited, regulated basis. Current oil-gas lease development would be allowed, but leases in No Lease areas of the ONAs would not be reoffered upon expiration. The ONAs would continue as open to mineral entry and development.

The No Action Alternative for oil and gas continues leasing as indicated in the Headwaters RMP. Leases within 1/4-mile of the NSO boundaries would be leased with NSO stipulations. Federal minerals in the core of the ONAs are not leased. Valid existing rights on current leases would be respected. These rights include surface occupancy for drilling and production purposes on leases issued in the early 1970s and held by production by the Blackleaf Unit, or in suspension because of the Blackleaf EIS.

Seismic activity is by motorized vehicles on existing roads and trails. Cross-country travel may be permitted at the discretion of the authorized officer.

All public lands are open to mineral entry according to the Headwaters RMP. Because the ONAs are closed to ORV use, a Plan of Operations would be required for operations not fitting the definition of casual use.

Removal of common variety minerals is allowed on a case-by-case review basis.

LANDS

Legal access does not exist to the ONAs from the east except at the north end of Ear Mountain. Public access to the ONAs would be developed on an "as the opportunity arises" basis.

Federal lands would remain in federal ownership. Acquisition of lands would be on a "willing seller" and "as the opportunity arises" basis. ONAs would be avoidance areas for rights-of-way, leases and permits which require development or disturbance of the land. A minimum of one public access will be acquired for each ONA.

BLM will pursue access acquisition on a priority basis. Efforts will be made to capitalize, when appropriate, on easement acquisition for in-place roads. BLM will actively and accurately disseminate existing and updated information on public lands access opportunities via maps and signing of the BLM road net and its connection to public roads.

Access would be conscientiously managed to ensure multiple-use goals. This objective would occur through balanced use of exchanges, right-of-way acquisition, grants, cooperative public/private management programs, or any other process that is effective. Another management goal would be to protect existing public access from closure in addition to the identification and acquisition of access. Proper stewardship of the access initiative must ensure protection of land (public/private) from overuse. Accordingly, questions of appropriate closure would be a part of planning for access (IM-MT-88-117, Montana Mission Statement from the White Paper on Access).

WATERSHED

Increases in vegetation due to enhancement practices or climatic influences would be allocated to livestock.

Areas currently in fair or poor range condition due to continuous heavy livestock grazing pressure would continue to experience accelerated erosion, degraded riparian sites and loss of vegetative cover.

BLM would file claims for water rights on all new water sources in accordance with State Office policy.

Livestock forage allocations would be in accordance with the HRMP.

SOILS

Livestock grazing would continue along riparian drainages and adjacent slopes at current levels.

NOXIOUS PLANTS

BLM would control, eradicate and/or contain noxious plant infestations on federal land under cooperative agreements with county weed boards. BLM is concerned with the spread of noxious plants by off-road vehicles, livestock, wildlife, humans, water, contaminated seed or hay, wind and machinery. If weed problems occur in a checkerboard ownership pattern, BLM would initiate control measures in conjunction with the other landowners.

The containment/eradication of noxious plants would proceed as analyzed in the Northwest Area Noxious Weed Control EIS and Supplement (1985, 1987) and the Programmatic Environmental Assessment on Containment/ Eradication of Selected Noxious Plants in the BLM Lewistown District, May 1986.

FIRE

The 1978 Lewistown District Fire Management Plan would remain in effect. No specific stipulations relative to the ONAs were made in that plan. Under this plan the U.S. Forest Service has fire control responsibility on the ONAs.

ADMINISTRATIVE ACCESS

The ONAs are closed to all forms of motorized vehicles use, with the exception of certain types of administrative access granted by the authorized officer. Administrative vehicular access would be granted to agency personnel for project and range allotment monitoring, and resource use evaluations. Access would be limited to existing roads and trails.

Livestock permittees would be allowed administrative access on a permit basis to administer their livestock lease (including but not limited to spring, fence, and pipeline maintenance, salt dispersal, livestock inspection and veterinarian care). Access would be limited to existing roads and trails.

Seismic exploration conducted by ground-travelling motorized vehicles would be allowed access on a permit basis, (limited to existing roads/trails). Cross-country motorized travel for seismic exploration may be permitted at the discretion of the authorized officer as outlined in 43 CFR 8340.0-5(a)3.

The Activity Plan would be amended to reflect a more restrictive motorized administrative access policy, should monitoring indicate this form of access is negatively impacting the ONA values.

PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE

WILDLIFE AND FISHERIES

Livestock grazing would be actively and intensively managed to improve important wildlife habitats. If substantial improvement is not observed within two grazing cycles after the AMP is implemented, livestock would be excluded from important wildlife habitats, riparian areas, and fescue/grassland benches by fence exclosures or by excluding water by fences.

The Chicken Coulee livestock lease would be intensively managed. Grizzly bear exclosures would be monitored.

No domestic sheep would be allowed on any of the ONAs due to conflicts with grizzly bears.

Access would be developed to the east boundaries of the ONAs to permit recreational use of wildlife and more opportunities for species management.

Seismic activity would be allowed in strict adherence to the RMF Wildlife Guidelines, with special emphasis on helicoptor use (flight paths, flight elevations, and 9-mile spacing).

Administrative vehicle use would permit wildlife trapping and transportation for management and research. Administrative vehicles would be permitted on the ONAs relative to achieving Grizzly Bear and Gray Wolf Recovery Plans.

Overnight camping would be allowed anytime; and would be monitored to determine any negative effects on wildlife (e.g., grizzly bear spring use areas, and ungulate winter ranges). Problems would be resolved until effects from camping are acceptable.

RECREATION

The VRM rating would be upgraded to Class I except for trailheads which would remain Class II. Trailheads would be defined as "roaded natural" and the ONAs as "semi-primitive non-motorized" according to the ROS classes.

Motorized administrative use may be permitted by the BLM authorized officer.

Camping would be permitted throughout the ONAs except at the Ear Mountain trailhead, springs, lakes, fragile vegetation communities, and other areas as camping restrictions are publicized through public information and education efforts including signs, maps, and public contacts.

ONA boundaries would be identified by signs and/or maps to advise the public of avoidance areas, ORV regulations, noxious plant control efforts, and essential public assistance information.

Public access to the Deep Creek-Battle Creek, Ear Mountain, Blind Horse and Chute Mountain ONAs would be developed.

Camping would not be allowed within 200 feet of all springs.

RANGE-LIVESTOCK

The Preferred Alternative would focus on implementation of intensive grazing practices that exclude livestock use during part of the growth season. Season-of-use restrictions, herding, or as a last alternative, fencing would be implemented where grazing pasture management is not practical. The general management practices on each of six ONA allotments proposed in the Preferred Alternative are shown in Table EA-2.

TABLE EA-2

LIVESTOCK MANAGEMENT — PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE

Allotment	Method of Grazing	Preferred Management Category	Range Improvement
Chicken Coulee	Pasture Rotation (exists)	I (improve)	Yes
East Front	Pasture Rotation	I (improve)	Yes
Cow Track	Season Restriction	M (maintain)	No
Green Timber	Herding	I (improve)	No
McCarthy	Season Restriction	C (Custodial)	No
Ear Mountain-TNC	Season Restriction	M (maintain)	No

Please refer to the Activity Plan, Range (Livestock) Section for greater detail.

CULTURAL AND HISTORIC

No cultural resources inventories exist, nor are any proposed. Standard inventories would be completed for each proposed action in the ONAs and data processed according to agreements with the Montana State Historic Preservation Office. If appropriate cultural resources are found, their utility for public interpretation and education will be evaluated.

AIR QUALITY

Projects contributing to a decline in air quality will require more stringent stipulations. The State of Montana, Air Quality Bureau, standard for ambient H_2S level is .05 ppm per hour, not to be exceeded more than once per year. The standard for ambient SO_2 level is .10 ppm per 24-hour average, not to be exceeded more than once per year. The BLM agrees that this is a reasonable threshold value for noxious gas control in the vicinity of the RMF ONAs. Present ambient concentrations in the vicinity of existing production facilities are well within these thresholds. Oil and gas companies proposing production facilities will be required to submit a plan to meet these threshold values.

There are several oil-gas leases held by production or suspended within the Blind Horse ONA. Should any development occur on these leases, venting and flaring of the wells will not be allowed if not economically justified or if in violation of state or federal air quality standards.

Intense dust abatement (daily road watering, use of resin road surfaces, etc.) on road surfaces and traffic control requirements will be required to minimize particulate matter in the air.

Under this alternative, projects contributing to a decline in air quality would require more stringent stipulations attached to the permit. Oil and gas production facilities adjacent to the ONAs will require vapor recovery units to contain noxious odors, such as those associated with hydrogen sulfide.

There are oil and gas leases held by production and/or suspension within the Blind Horse ONA. Should any development occur on these leases, venting of the wells would not be allowed. Flaring would only be allowed during well tests (and/or emergency situations) with an approved H_2S contingency plan and with proper fire abatement procedures in place. Intense dust abatement (daily road watering, resin road surfaces, etc.) on road surfaces and traffic control requirements would be required to minimize particulate matter in the air.

Prescribed burning would be done in coordination with the State of Montana Airshed Coordinator.

MINERALS

Oil and gas leasing would continue as indicated in the No Action Alternative.

Motorized seismic activity would be allowed on designated roads and trails, but cross-country motorized seismic activity would not be permitted. Helicopter or backpack seismic would be allowed throughout the ONAs. The ONAs would be open to mineral entry, but there would be no removal of common variety (sand, gravel) minerals.

LANDS

The Deep Creek-Battle Creek ONA would require three access routes. One of these access routes would be acquired within 5 years, the additional two routes would be acquired within 12 years.

The Chute Mountain ONA would require two access routes. One access route would be acquired in 6 years, the second route within 10 years.

The Ear Mountain ONA would require one additional access route (the existing route is the county road, northeast corner of The Nature Conservancy addition to the ONA); this route would be to the south portion of the ONA. The additional access route would be acquired within 10 years.

The Blind Horse ONA would require two access routes. One route would be acquired in 5 years, the second within 10 years.

Condemnation authority would be used when landowner negotiations fail to produce an acceptable access route. BLM would pursue access acquisition on a priority basis. BLM would pursue, when appropriate, easements acquisition for in-place roads constructed for other uses. BLM would actively and accurately disseminate existing and updated information on public lands access opportunities by maps and signing of the BLM road net and its connection to public roads.

Access would be conscientiously managed to ensure multiple-use goals. This objective would be achieved through balanced use of exchanges, right-of-way acquisition, grants, cooperative public/private management programs, or other productive efforts. Another BLM goal will be to protect existing access to public lands from closure. Proper stewardship of the access initiative must ensure protection of land (public/private) from overuse. Accordingly, questions of appropriate closure will be a part of planning for access.

WATERSHED

All vegetation increases due to enhancement practices or climatic influences would be allocated to wildlife and watershed. Livestock AUMs may be reduced either temporarily or permanently in degraded watershed condition allotments until the range condition improves to good or better.

Riparian areas identified as important to wildlife and/or fisheries would be managed to maintain or improve the current condition.

BLM would claim water rights on all new water sources and on those existing sources which have no claims. Even if the permittee contributes funding for the project, BLM will share at least a co-held claim.

Produced water from oil and gas activities would be disposed of in accordance with state and federal regulations.

SOILS

BLM would reduce erosion and compaction resulting from livestock in riparian areas and improve soil productivity and vegetation ground cover in the ONAs by implementing intensive grazing methods.

NOXIOUS PLANTS

BLM would control, eradicate and/or contain noxious plant infestations on federal land under cooperative agreements with county weed boards. BLM is concerned with the spread of noxious plants by off-road vehicles, livestock, wildlife, humans, water, contaminated seed or hay, wind and machinery. BLM would initiate control measures in conjunction with the other landowners if weed problems occur in a checkerboard ownership pattern.

The containment/eradication of noxious plants would proceed as analyzed in the Northwest Area Noxious Weed Control EIS and Supplement (1985, 1987) and the Programmatic Environmental Assessment on Containment/Eradication of Selected Noxious Plants in the BLM Lewistown District, May 1986.

FIRE

Wildfires: The U.S. Forest Service would continue as the head agency and would use appropriate suppression action in ONAs, including heavy equipment only when necessary to prevent spread to adjacent private landowners. Normal suppression techniques would include pumper trucks and hand-line construction crews. Air attacks would be permissible if fires escape initial attack and appear to be threatening adjacent lands. Fire camps would be located outside the ONAs.

Prescribed Burns: Specific areas where prescribed burns can improve vegetation condition have yet to be inventoried and prioritized. That inventory would be completed by 1990. Areas where prescribed burning can benefit range condition and wildlife habitat include: rough fescue and/or Idaho fescue grassland benches where a majority of fescue plants have become "wolfy." The highest priority of burning would be given to those benches important as bighorn sheep and elk winter range and decadent aspen groves in need of regeneration for wildlife.

Modified suppression techniques and prescribed burns can improve vegetation vigor and increased ground cover for soil and watershed stability.

These techniques can change vegetation by reducing decadent plant growth which will improve plant vigor and density; and by changing the composition of present species of grasses, forbs, and shrubs.

Fuel management would be treated on a site-by-site basis.

ADMINISTRATIVE ACCESS

The ONAs are closed to all forms of motorized vehicles, with the exception of certain types of administrative vehicular access granted by the authorized officer. Agency personnel, livestock permittees and seismic operators would be allowed the same types of access as outlined in the No Action Alternative, with two exceptions: all administrative vehicular access would be restricted to designated roads and trails; and there would be no cross-country motorized travel for seismic exploration.

The Activity Plan will be amended to reflect a more restrictive motorized administrative access policy should monitoring indicate this form of access is negatively impacting the ONA values.

INTRODUCTION TO THE EXISTING ENVIRONMENT

This section summarizes various physical and biological features and resources in the ONAs that could be impacted by either alternative. Much of the information identified in this section was taken from the draft HRMP, May 1983.

Forest products and wilderness will not be addressed in this EA because they would not be impacted by the proposed alternative.

EXISTING ENVIRONMENT

The reader is advised that the text below is limited, and that greater detail is available in the proceeding Activity Plan.

WILDLIFE AND FISHERIES

The wildlife values occurring in each ONA are summarized in Appendix 4.

RECREATION

The four ONAs are located in the spectacular scenic setting of the Rocky Mountain Front Range and are known for their outstanding visual quality (Class A scenery rating). These areas possess an untouched, natural character with few imprints of human activity. These human imprints consist of vehicle ways, trails, fences, and water developments.

The Blind Horse ONA has 7 vehicle ways, 2 trails, 2 miles of fence and a spring development. The U.S. Forest Service (USFS) Frazier Mountain-Chicken Coulee Trail No. 153 provides access to the northwest corner of the ONA, and USFS Clary Coulee Trail No. 177 allows access to the west boundary of the ONA. The Ear Mountain ONA has one trail that traverses the ONA on a north-south axis in the northern part, and the USFS trail No. 173 crosses the southwest corner of the ONA. The Chute Mountain ONA has one vehicle way, and USFS trail No. 173 cuts across the northeast corner of the ONA. The Deep Creek-Battle Creek ONA has five vehicle ways and USFS trail No. 128 that crosses the northwest corner.

Several miles of fence associated with livestock pastures have been built, plus two exclosures in the southern half of the Blind Horse ONA. Numerous abandoned seismic lines have been slated for rehabilitation. Two springs, Clark and Newman, and associated water pipelines and tanks have been constructed in the ONA. An exploratory oil-gas well (E-2) in the southwest corner of Section 6 has been proposed under a valid, existing oil and gas lease.

Recreational activities include sightseeing, hiking, photography, horseback riding, camping, snowmobiling, and hunting. There were a total of 610 visits to these ONAs, last year. Hunting provides 80% of the recreational activity. Recreational facilities or developments are currently non-existent on public land although the 12.7 acre site on the northern segment of Ear Mountain ONA will be used for trailhead projects.

The undeveloped trail crosses the Ear Mountain ONA on a north-south axis in the northern segment. The Willow Creek Plateau Trail (USFS No. 173) touches the southwest corner of the ONA.

The Chute Mountain ONA has four trails of which two in the southeast corner are directly related to seismic line activity. One of these trails in the extreme southeast corner of the ONA has been identified for total abandonment and rehabilitation. The other trail north of this one will be partially rehabilitated. The Willow Creek Plateau Trail (USFS No. 173) cuts across the northeast corner of the ONA. Another trail crosses in the southwest corner and deadends at the USFS boundary just outside the ONA boundary.

The Deep Creek-Battle Creek ONA has four trails and one road within its boundaries. Two of the trails in the southern segment of the ONA are associated with seismic activity. The Deep Creek-Biggs Creek Trail (USFS No. 128) crosses the northern half of the ONA. This route provides legal access to the western boundary of the ONAs. The road is located along the South Fork of Deep Creek in the northeast corner of the ONA. Another trail borders the ONA in the northwest corner of the ONA.

RANGE-LIVESTOCK

There are six livestock grazing allotments on BLM-administered land on the RMF ONAs. Each is summarized in Table EA-3.

A total of 10,210 of the 13,087 ONA acres are leased for livestock grazing (Table EA-3). The locations of these allotments are shown on Figures 6-9 of Appendix 2. Each of the six allotments is leased by a single individual. Three allotments are for cattle, and three for horses.

Only the Chicken Coulee allotment is presently operating under an allotment management plan (1974). The Green Timber and East Front allotments are proposed for AMPs.

The 1979-1981 inventory range vegetation condition results were approximately 10% excellent, 50% good, 35% fair, and 5% poor.

Most of the proposed Chicken Coulee allotment range developments are complete. The East Front allotment developments are proposed in the proceeding AP (Table 12). No projects were proposed for other leases except for the McCarthy boundary fence.

TABLE EA-3

ONA ALLOTMENT SUMMARY

ONA	Allotment	Type Use	Public Acres	AUMs
Blind Horse	Chicken Coulee	Cattle	3,340	279
	Cowtrack	Horse	360	36
Deep Creek/ Battle Creek	Green Timber	Cattle	727	25
	East Front	Cattle	2,488	250
	East Front	Cattle	2,290	192
Ear Mountain	McCarthy	Horse	60	6
	Ear Mountain	Horse	945	78
		Lease TOTAL	10,210	866

CULTURAL AND HISTORIC

Cultural resources along the Rocky Mountain Front consist of prehistoric and historic remains dating from 11,000 years ago to the advent of the Modern Era in the 1920s. Most of the prehistoric remains represent aboriginal campsites and special activity sites such as quarries for extracting stone for tool making, areas for hunting various game and furbearing animals, and structures for conducting religious ceremonies. Historic remains consist of mining sites (including adits, cabins, mills, prospect holes, water developments, kilns, and mining towns) and sites related to late 19th century Euro-American settlement such as ranch buildings, irrigation projects, line shacks, roads, and other similar subjects.

The ONAs have not been inventoried for cultural resources, but if they follow the general pattern for the Rocky Mountain Front, they probably contain prehistoric campsites and special activity sites in limited quantities. Although not professionally documented, one prehistoric campsite is known to exist in the Blind Horse ONA. It is expected that some of the higher prominences have aboriginal religious sites (vision quest structures) also. The only historic site or feature known for the ONAs is a water diversion structure or flume in the vicinity of Chute Mountain. Other historic sites are probably rare in the ONAs because of the terrain and lack of suitable resources for extraction by Euro-Americans (mining resources, timber, agricultural lands, etc.).

AIR QUALITY

The air quality of the four ONAs is very good with little degradation due to human or industrial sources. The ONAs are designated Class II pursuant to the 1970 Clean Air Act and the Montana State Air Quality Bureau. The four ONAs are within 10 miles of and downwind of the Bob Marshall Wilderness Complex, a designated Class I area.

Winter haze has been reported along the RMF, particularly during winter cold periods. It is probable that the haze results from pollutants produced by wood burning stoves during times of cold, subsiding, high pressure air masses with strong surface inversions. These inversions are rare, but tend to trap and accumulate stove smoke when they do occur. The ONA upper benches and ridges have good potential to disperse any pollutants as they are more exposed to upper level prevailing winds, and are above any inversion levels.

MINERALS

The ONAs lie in a structurally complex area called the Overthrust Belt. This is an area where older rocks from the west have been thrust up over younger rocks. This overthrusting is what creates the distinctive rock features such as "Volcano Reef." The overthrusting also creates many structural traps for oil and gas. When these traps are created in rocks of the right geologic age, reservoirs containing oil and gas may be found. The nearby Blackleaf Canyon Unit has production from two wells that have estimated reserves of 35 billion cubic feet (BCF). The reservoir they produce from covers an area of 600 surface acres. The wells produce from the Mississippian Sun River formation, a fractured, sometimes dolomitized limestone. There are two producing horizons in the Blackleaf field, the upper Sun River "A" and the lower Sun River "B." It is felt that these formations extend under the Blind Horse ONA.

The ONAs have moderate to high oil and gas potential but are apparently devoid of other economic mineral deposits except for limestone and dolmite of potential commercial grade. The difficulty of developing these resources, combined with more accessible and larger deposits in other areas, make these deposits less desirable (Mudge et. al., USGS open file report 84-0566, 1984).

There are no known coal resources in the ONAs.

There may be some glacial deposits of sand and gravel in the ONAs. These would probably be of limited use due to the difficulty of removing them and other more plentiful, accessible sources.

LANDS

Currently no powerlines, pipelines, or communication sites exist on the ONAs. Legal public access from the east exists only to the Ear Mountain ONA via a county road. Non-motorized access is available, primarily by horseback, from the west side through U.S. Forest Service.

WATERSHED

The ONAs climate is a modified continental type with cold winters and summers of warm days and cool nights. The Continental Divide and other mountain ranges are important factors in the precipitation pattern of the area. Annual precipitation averages 30 inches across the ONAs. May and June are normally the wettest months. Yearly snowfall amounts can reach 200 inches accounting for much of the annual precipitation.

The ONAs are drained by the following creeks: Blind Horse, Chicken Coulee, the North Fork of Willow Creek, Edwards, Deep and Battle Creeks. Only Deep Creek is perennial. Water quality is generally excellent, but localized areas exhibit high amounts of suspended sediment during periods of high flow.

Scarcity of surface soil on the steep slopes in the ONAs results in rapid runoff from snowmelt and summer thunderstorms. Natural ponds and wetlands are generally lacking throughout the ONAs. Deep Creek and several scattered springs and seeps are the only natural permanent water sources.

Lack of adequate water sources has resulted in livestock overuse around those existing sources, especially on the South Fork of Deep Creek.

Little information exists concerning groundwater availability in the ONAs. It is suspected that groundwater could potentially be found in the near surface geology (less than 500-foot depth) of the (1) exposed and thrusted Mississippian limestone, (2) exposed Cretaceous-age sandstones, siltstones, and mudstones, and (3) surficial deposits of glacial till and alluvial gravels.

To date, no ground water sources have been developed in the ONAs.

BLM has claimed water rights on three developed springs, two in the Blind Horse ONA and one in the Deep Creek ONA. No other BLM claims exist within the ONA boundaries.

SOILS

Specific soil and interpretive information is available from recent soil surveys made by the U.S. Soil Conservation Service (SCS) for Teton County. These data are available at the SCS Office, in Choteau, Montana and BLM Offices at Lewistown and Great Falls. Soils of the ONAs are derived from sedimentary bedrock and alluvium of mixed rock sources.

The ONA landscapes have complex and diverse soil patterns varying greatly in characteristics, topography and productivity.

NOXIOUS PLANTS

There is local and regional concern about the potential spread of noxious plants from roads, trails, and riparian bottomlands to adjacent upland slopes and downstream. Very limited knowledge exists regarding noxious plant infestation of the ONAs, although lower elevation sites are well known by local government and private business.

FIRE

The ONAs fire history is very evident as plant community age and species distribution clearly indicate that fire has been a common factor in these environments. Wildfire and limited controlled burning for homesteader land clearance have altered the RMF, and the result has been a pleasing blanket of a highly diverse botanical community which supports many wildlife populations, some fisheries, and considerable human recreational use.

ADMINISTRATIVE ACCESS

Because the HRMP designated the ONAs closed to motorized vehicles, there is currently very little vehicular use in these areas. The Blind Horse ONA is the most heavily roaded and receives some minor use by the grazing permittee, inspecting cattle and maintaining range improvements. BLM personnel also occasionally access this ONA to monitor range conditions and trend and inspect range improvements.

One road runs through the center of the Ear Mountain ONA. This road is regulated by a locked iron gate by the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks at the Ear Mountain Wildlife Management Area trailhead. It receives very little use, except occasional MDFW&P personnel performing wildlife studies.

The Deep Creek-Battle Creek and Chute Mountain ONAs have very few roads and receive very little use, except by livestock permittees.

Recent seismic exploration has been conducted in all four of the ONAs. Vehicle use has been negligible because most of this activity has been conducted using helicopters.

The ONAs are closed to all forms of motorized vehicles. Administrative access is permitted on a regulated basis and restricted to designated roads and trails for governmental resources administration, livestock lessees, oil-gas seismic exploration, and other restricted actions. Cross-country motorized travel is not allowed.

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL

Teton County derives its economic strength from the natural resources. These resources include the land which is used for crop and livestock production, oil/gas production, and water and wildlife that offer outdoor recreation opportunities. Most of the county's employment and personal income is derived from the use of natural resources.

Employment in Teton County was relatively stable from 1980 to 1984 increasing by only 2%. Although employment remained relatively stable there were significant shifts between sectors of the economy. Employment in transportation and public utilities along with wholesale trade decreased while employment in manufacturing, construction and agricultural services increased. Agriculture, government and services are the main sources of employment in Teton County. Those three sectors of the economy account for 61% of the 1984 total employment. Government was the major source of earnings in 1984, with transportation/public utilities and services contributing the next largest portions. Total personal income was 23% lower in 1984 than in 1980.

Teton County ranked fourth in total cash receipts for all agricultural products in Montana in 1984. Employment in agriculture was estimated at 936 jobs in 1984 or 31% of the work force. In 1986, 3% of Montana's total gas production and 1% of the total oil production was from Teton County. It is estimated that oil and gas extraction provides most of the 107 mining jobs or 4% of the work force.

Evaluating the recreation, tourism and travel industry is difficult because this industry's employment and income earnings cut across many other industry sectors, mainly retail trade and services. Hunting is the primary recreational activity in the area. Deer hunting within the ONAs is estimated at 430 hunter days annually, while non-consumptive activities is estimated at 180 activity days. Recreationists using these areas spend an estimated $37,000.00 each year. These expenditures represent direct payments to sporting goods stores, motels, service stations, and other services. As recreation dollars circulate through the economy, an estimated $67,000.00 will result in total business activity with $20,000.00 in earnings, and the equivalent of one job, primarily in the retail trade and service sector.

ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

NO ACTION ALTERNATIVE

WILDLIFE AND FISHERIES

The current level of range management on ONAs is benefiting wildlife in the Blind Horse ONA, but ignoring wildlife needs and permitting degradation of important habitats on others (Deep Creek-Battle Creek and Chute Mountain ONAs). These negative consequences were discussed previously in the AP. Positive consequences from implementation of a grazing system as was done in the Blind Horse ONA are also given in the AP.

The oil and gas program was severely restricted on ONAs by HRMP/EIS decisions, and as existing leases are terminated and either not reoffered or only offered with a NSO stipulation, this level of wildlife protection will be fully realized. In the meantime, adherence to the RMF Wildlife Guidelines will provide substantial protections, including protection during seismic, which is allowed under either "old or new" leasing policies.

Hardrock mineral entry policies are less defined. Should a discovery be made and development follow, it could result in significant impacts to important wildlife resources if the 1872 Mining Law prevailed. However, it is unlikely that such mineral values exist in the ONAs.

Impacts to wildlife from ORVs or excessive levels of human visitation into ONAs is not a problem under current management because ORV use is restricted to administrative use as defined in the HRMP, and because of the very limited access to these areas. No restrictions on overnight camping or day use have been made and none have been deemed necessary at this time.

The current fire management program has not emphasized the use of fire to improve habitats and no such benefits have been realized.

RECREATION

Under the No Action Alternative there could be a change in the recreation opportunity-setting category and acreage of BLM-administered land. Any activities on the adjoining USFS, private, or state land may result in a change in overall ROS category for the area.

The valid, existing rights associated with oil-gas in Blind Horse ONA could result in 2½ miles of new road construction and drill pad activity for an exploratory well E-2 in the SW¼, Section 6. There would be a reduction of 9 acres from the semi-primitive non-motorized ROS category to the roaded natural category. The overall impact of this activity would be negative and significant.

The Ear Mountain ONA trailhead would reduce the semi-primitive motorized ROS category by 2 acres. These acres would be converted to roaded natural, an insignificant negative impact.

The implementation of the No Action Alternative would not significantly impact recreation use in the ONAs. Access to the Ear Mountain ONA, at the trailhead on South Fork of Teton River, may increase some hiking and horseback activities. This would be an insignificant impact.

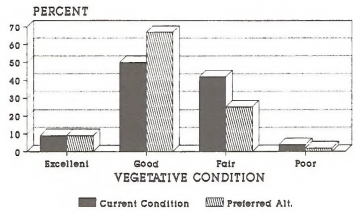
RANGE-LIVESTOCK

The No Action Alternative would disallow all grazing systems and range improvements and would negatively impact all vegetation communities and conditions. Season-long grazing would continue to reduce vigor of the best forage plants for wildlife and livestock and cause secondary species invaders and noxious plants to invade. Current conditions shown in Figure EA-1 for long-term changes in vegetation condition would not be maintained. Good and excellent conditions would be reduced to lower value lands. The majority of range vegetation would go to fair condition within 10 years. More poor condition areas, especially riparian and key range sites, would be evident. Lack of noxious plant control would eventually lead to large infestations of spotted knapweed and locoweed and proportionately reduce quality forage.

The No Action Alternative would change the management category of two of six grazing leases within the ONAs.

An allotment that was designated Improve (I) or Maintain (M) in the HRMP would become custodial under this alternative.

FIGURE EA-1: LONG-TERM CHANGES IN VEGETATIVE CONDITION.



SOURCE: BLM

CULTURAL AND HISTORIC

Few activities will occur under this alternative and thus, the potential impacts to archaeological, historical or paleontological resources from surface disturbing projects will be negligible. However, the continuance of unmanaged grazing in several allotments could result in livestock trampling damage to cultural resources along streams and near springs. These areas will require an inventory and if any significant sites were found, mitigation to prevent further damage. Mitigation would consist of salvage, stabilization, fencing or a combination of these techniques.

The potential impacts to cultural resources under this alternative would depend largely on where the proposed projects will be located. The development of four trailheads with parking lots and camping spaces (one in each ONA) has considerable potential to affect cultural resources, especially if they are placed along stream courses where more level terrain occurs. However, if they are placed on the lower slopes near the east boundaries of the ONAs, there is a slight chance that impacts could occur.

The proposed spring developments and pipeline installations in the Blind Horse and Deep Creek-Battle Creek ONAs could cause impacts to cultural resources, depending on the characteristics and locations of the projects. There is a fair probability that archaeological sites will be found near springs but usually they can be avoided by carefully designing and supervising the projects.

AIR QUALITY

Under this alternative, oil and gas exploration and development may occur on the Blind Horse ONA which would lower air quality on BLM-administered land. Fewer stipulations relative to air quality would result in air quality degradation as a result of the following pollutant emissions:

Exhaust from drillings.

Exhaust from vehicular travel to and from the site.

Fugitive dust from traffic on access roads.

Gases encountered during drilling operations which could be released through the mud system.

Emissions from producing wellsite processing facilities (heater/treaters, tanks, etc.).

Emissions from possible pipeline ruptures.

The above pollutants would be minor, short-term impacts during the life of the drilling operation and would cease once the project is complete. There would be a short-term (90-120 day) negative impact to the recreationist using the Blind Horse ONA at the time drilling operations are in progress.

Development of a producing wellsite could create, long-term minor negative impacts resulting from any facilities (heater/treaters), that are required at the wellhead for production; causing noxious odors and/or gases.

A pipeline rupture, releasing concentrations of gases, would be a major short-term impact, until the pipeline could be repaired. However, with the high wind speed associated with the ONAs, any noxious fumes and gases would be expected to disperse rapidly.

Seismic activity would have a negligible impact on air quality, because of its short duration. There would be a minor increase in dust and vehicle exhaust; a short-term negligible impact.

MINERALS

The No Action Alternative restricts oil and gas drilling in the ONAs by requiring directional drilling and timing windows. Leases that were issued prior to the HRMP and are still valid and have access rights that allow them to construct pads and production facilities on areas to become "NSO" or "No Lease" when the current leases expire.

Leasing under the No Action Alternative will be restricted to NSO leases 1/4-mile inside the ONA boundaries. Areas farther than 1/4-mile inside ONA boundaries will not be leased. These leasing restrictions deny any surface disturbance related to new oil and gas leases within the ONAs.

Seismic activity is restricted in the ONAs to motorized vehicles only on existing roads and trails. A provision exists to allow cross-country motorized seismic, but it has never been permitted since the ONAs were created. Helicopters or backpack seismic activities have been allowed across the ONAs.

The No Action Alternative has very limited restrictions on mining activity and since the occurrence of economically valuable minerals in the ONAs seem to be very slight, the No Action Alternative has no affect on coal resources.

Common variety mineral extraction is allowed under the No Action Alternative. There would be restrictions on a case-by-case basis as the need arose.

LANDS

The No Action Alternative is less defined and less specific with no time frame and without specific areas identified as needing access. Access acquisition under this plan is "as opportunity arises."

WATERSHED

Livestock grazing would continue at present levels. The areas currently impacted by overuse would continue to decline in both range condition and watershed condition (refer to the Range-Livestock section in the Existing Environment portion of this EA). The remainder of the watershed may experience degradation in condition as current vegetation conditions would not be maintained (refer to the Range-Livestock section in this portion of the EA).

A downward trend in vegetation condition would result in lowered watershed condition, decreased ground cover, increased erosion and suspended sediment in surface waters, degraded riparian vegetation and stream bank stability.

SOILS

Continued trampling of soil and vegetation along stream courses would result in severe soil erosion, water quality reduction, and reduced vegetation ground cover.

NOXIOUS PLANTS

This alternative would allow the present noxious plants to expand significantly as animals, people, and vehicles move in and out of the localized areas to adjacent noxious plant-free areas.

Watershed conditions would deteriorate as noxious plants displace native vegetation. Wildlife and domestic livestock would be forced to secure desirable vegetation for food and cover at other locations as knapweed and other noxious plants increase. This would result in greater runoff, less desirable vegetation production and more sediment moving into streams.

FIRE

Current fire management processes would permit the use of heavy equipment, construction of roads-trails and considerable disturbance. There are no restrictions in place which would protect the fragile environment of these ONAs.

ADMINISTRATIVE ACCESS

The ONAs are closed to all motorized vehicles, except for those types of administrative access permitted by the authorized officer. Under this alternative, the impacts from permitted administrative access would be minor. The Blind Horse ONA is the most roaded, but receives very little use even from the grazing permittee.

Administrative access relative to seismic activity, especially cross-country travel, could potentially be a major impact. This is a discretionary action of the authorized officer. Past history indicates the use of helicopters and/or backpacks is more efficient in the rugged terrain of the ONAs.

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL

There would be no effect on the local economy in the short or long term with this alternative.

PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE

WILDLIFE AND FISHERIES

This alternative would significantly benefit wildlife and fisheries resources by intensively managing livestock on important habitats in the Deep Creek-Battle Creek and Chute Mountain ONAs; areas that have a history of livestock over-utilization and poor distribution. These areas have exceptionally high wildlife values as given in Table 15 of Appendix 4. If properly managed, these values could significantly increase. The increases would be anticipated on both public and private land; a double bonus for wildlife. Riparian habitats important to grizzly bear and winter-spring mule deer and bighorn sheep ranges could be significantly improved.

Continuation of intensive livestock management in the Blind Horse ONA would ensure continued improvement in wildlife habitats, which have evidenced significant improvement since implementation of the Chicken Coulee AMP 13 years ago.

Effects from the minerals program, oil and gas as well as hardrock mining, would be similar to those discussed under the No Action Alternative.

The lands and recreation programs have generated proposals in this AP which would negatively affect wildlife, including threatened and endangered species. These are proposals to acquire public access to the ONA boundaries and to develop campground type facilities at these boundaries. Some aspects of these proposals might be slightly positive in that a more controlled harvest of hunted species could result.

Increasing human visitation along previously restricted roads or constructing roads along new routes to ONAs and then encouraging camping, picnicking, hiking and other forms of recreation would create significant human "associated" impacts where there previously were few or none. It is anticipated that most people would not be interested in visiting these areas during the most critical winter and spring periods for the most important species. ONAs are primarily important winter range for a variety of ungulates and spring range for grizzly bears (Table 15 in Appendix 4).

If human visitation levels during these periods were determined to be excessive and the resultant effects unacceptable, seasonal restrictions as outlined in the RMF Wildlife Guidelines could be applied. Possible impacts from increased access plus possible methods that can be used to lessen such negative consequences are more thoroughly discussed in the attached Biological Evaluation (see Appendix 5) prepared for consultation as directed under the Endangered Species Act, 1973, Section 7(c), as amended.

An active fire management program using modified suppression techniques and prescribed burning as tools to improve "wolfy" grasslands and decadent aspen groves would yield positive benefits to wildlife. Habitats most likely to benefit would be grassland winter range areas important to bighorn sheep, and possibly elk, and grizzly bear riparian areas with aspen predominating.

Wildlife habitats in the Deep Creek-Battle Creek and Chute Mountain ONAs would be expected to significantly improve by implementing the preferred grazing program for the East Front allotment.

Acquiring access, as under the Preferred Alternative, would facilitate wildlife resource enjoyment by the public and aid in harvest when needed. It will be important to ensure that over harvest does not occur.

The Preferred Alternative administrative access policy would be far more effective in limiting or precluding wildlife resources damages and losses.

RECREATION

Under this alternative there could be changes in the ROS category and acreage of BLM-administered land. There would be a reduction of 8 acres from semi-primitive motorized category as a result of the construction of four trailhead sites (2 acres each per ONA). These acres would be converted to a roaded natural category (a minor negative impact).

The E-2 wellsite could be located outside the Blind Horse ONA boundary and directional drilling could be used to develop the well. This would be minor negative impact.

The implementation of the Preferred Action Alternative could impact the recreation activities in the ONAs. The increased access provided by the four trailheads could promote other types of recreational use and/or increase the existing use levels. The better access could foster more public winter use. The overall impact, though minor, would be positive. Some recreationists would view it as a determent in that quality hunting or recreation opportunities may be diminished due to increased accessibility. This would be a minor negative impact.

RANGE-LIVESTOCK

Beneficial impacts from the Preferred Action Alternative would occur in those allotments that are in generally low ecological condition, but have a high potential for improvement, in terms of rangeland resources and management opportunities. The major long-term impact on native vegetation would be an improvement in the kinds and amounts of vegetation produced on sites that are now in poor or fair condition. Some poor condition sites would be converted to fair condition and some fair condition sites would be converted to good condition. Figure EA-1, derived from the final HRMP, would apply to the grazing allotments in the ONAs.

Allotments that have proposed grazing deferment would provide the fastest rate of improvement in condition trends shown in Figure EA-1. Grazing systems that provide plant rest during part or all of the growing season are beneficial to vegetation vigor, density and reproduction.

Proposed burning of 600 acres of shrubby cinquefoil—grassland would improve range grass vigor, density and availability for forage for wildlife ungulates and livestock. The invader shrubby cinquefoil would resprout and invade to preburn density within (estimated) 10 years because it is a fire sprouter. Burning shrubby cinquefoil would be a short-term benefit to vegetation conditions.

The range improvements summarized in Tables 10 and 12 of the proceeding Activity Plan would be necessary to implement management objectives and would have a desirable impact on vegetation. These improvements would lead to improved livestock distribution and/or production of better kinds and quantities of livestock and wildlife forage. That would have a beneficial effect on wild ungulates and livestock production.

Livestock and wildlife would benefit from noxious and poisonous plants control as Integrated Pest Management program would be implemented. The use of biological agents (insects), as they become available and effective, would be desirable in maintaining good vegetation conditions.

CULTURAL AND HISTORIC

The potential impacts to cultural resources under this alternative would depend largely on where the proposed projects will be located. The development of four trailheads with parking lots and camping spaces (one in each ONA) has considerable potential to affect cultural resources, especially if they are placed along stream courses where more level terrain occurs. However, if they are placed on the lower slopes near the east boundaries of the ONAs, there is only a slight chance that impacts could occur.

The proposed spring developments and pipeline installations in the Deep Creek-Battle Creek ONA could cause impacts to cultural resources, depending on the characteristics and locations of the projects. There is a fair probability that archaeological sites will be found near springs but usually they can be avoided by carefully designing and supervising the projects.

The controlled burns proposed for the Blind Horse and Deep Creek-Battle Creek ONAs have a slight probability of causing impacts to cultural resources. Areas with timber sometimes harbor remnants of prehistoric and historic aboriginal structures and these would be destroyed by fire. Such sites are rare, however.

Access routes (including seismic lines) to and in the ONAs may cause impacts to cultural resources if they occur along stream channels. Impact types would be site disturbance from blading or partial destruction of sites as a result of erosion from vehicle traffic along unimproved trails. The impacts might occur on public lands in the ONAs as well as on adjacent private lands. In most instances, however, these impacts can be avoided by changing the route of the access.

In the event that impacts to significant cultural resources cannot be avoided, mitigation measures would be applied after consultation with the State Historic Preservation Officer and Advisory Council on Historic Preservation. Mitigation measures commonly used for cultural resources include archaeological salvage excavation, extensive photo documentation, barricade construction and project monitoring. Given the flexibility of encountering a significant site, the overall impact of the Preferred Action Alternative is expected to be low.

Indirect impacts to cultural resources could occur from the expected increase in visitors to the ONAs. Some visitors may collect artifacts while hiking and camping. These impacts could be mitigated by placing signs at the entrance to each ONA indicating that such activity is illegal. Furthermore, the sites would be monitored to determine if impacts had occurred and if so, additional mitigation could be applied (fencing, surveillance, salvage).

No inventories have been conducted, thus, irreversible and irretrievable commitment of cultural resources in the ONAs is unknown.

AIR QUALITY

Under this alternative, the impacts to air quality from oil and gas would be similar to the No Action Alternative. Drilling operations will result in minor short-term impacts to air quality. However, dust abatement and traffic control requirements would mitigate some of the particulate matter in the air. Nuisance odors and gas concentrations exceeding the State of Montana ambient H_2S and SO_2 threshold values may necessitate vapor recovery systems on all liquid storage facilities. Oil and gas companies proposing production facilities would be required to submit a plan to meet these threshold values (see Air Quality discussion in AP for values). Flaring and/or venting would not be allowed if not economically justified or if in violation of state or federal air quality standards.

All production facilities would be required to be constructed outside the ONA boundary, further reducing noxious odors and maintaining the air quality.

Impacts to air quality from seismic activity would be the same as in the No Action Alternative.

MINERALS

The Preferred Alternative would restrict oil and gas drilling in the same manner as the No Action Alternative. The leasing restrictions would be the same as in the No Action Alternative.

Seismic activity would be further restricted from the No Action Alternative by allowing no cross-country motorized seismic activity.

Locatable minerals would be restricted to the same degree as in the No Action Alternative.

Sand and gravel extraction would be forbidden in the Preferred Alternative.

LANDS

The increased access would provide and promote other types of recreational use and/or increase the existing use levels. Improved public access would foster more winter use. The overall impact, though minor, would be positive.

WATERSHED

This plan would greatly benefit watershed conditions and values. The rest-rotation grazing method or similar methods would benefit vegetation resulting in improved watershed condition.

The most obvious benefit would be in reduced erosion and suspended sediment in surface waters, especially along the South Fork of Deep Creek. More subtle improvements would include reduced runoff, lowered peak flows, increased infiltration and soil moisture, improved streambank stability and water quality.

SOILS

There could be a long-term positive effect on native vegetation cover and soil stability as intensive grazing methods are implemented. This would reduce runoff and improve soil productivity. Riparian areas and drainages would stabilize as livestock compaction is reduced.

NOXIOUS PLANTS

Application of the integrated pest management process would be far more effective in resolving noxious plant problems in the ONAs than limited chemical action. Biological agents, excluding cows and horses, could be a partial solution to noxious plant spread in riparian and other sensitive environments in the ONAs.

FIRE

A Fire Management Activity Plan that is resource management driven will be prepared under this alternative and would cover fire suppression, prescribed fire, and fuels management.

Appropriate suppression action would be taken on all wildfires that occur within the ONAs.

ADMINISTRATIVE ACCESS

Impacts under this alternative would be similar to those under the No Action Alternative. However, impacts would be even less significant because no motorized, cross country seismic exploration would be allowed.

Minor impacts from motorized, seismic exploration on designated roads and trails would be mitigated by timing stipulations utilizing the RMF Guidelines, as would non-motorized exploration by the use of helicopters and/or backpacks.

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL

The Preferred Plan would provide public access to the ONAs along with trailhead and range developments. This would increase recreation use in the area, primarily deer hunting. At the same time this could affect outfitters who use the area by curtailing some recreation use associated with guided trips. This alternative could also affect one ranch operation with some changes in livestock management due to a change in pastures and seasons of use within the Deep Creek-Battle Creek ONA.

In the short term, it is estimated that recreation/wildlife related expenditures in the area could increase by $182,000.00 annually. This would be due to increased recreation use with public access along with proposed trailheads and facilities. These expenditures would result in approximately $335,000.00 in total business activity with $102,000.00 in earnings and the equivalent of four jobs, primarily in the retail trade and service sectors. In the long term, recreation expenditures could increase by $248,000.00 annually. This would be due to increased recreation use from public access and improved wildlife habitat. These expenditures would result in approximately $456,000.00 in total business activity with $139,000.00 in earnings and the equivalent of five jobs, primarily in the retail trade and service sectors. This business activity would occur in Teton and the surrounding counties and is a small fraction of the total business activity in the area.

The following investment analysis was completed to evaluate the benefits and costs of implementing the preferred plan. It compares the relative benefits and costs and probably does not represent the actual values that would occur over time nor does it include all benefits or costs but only those that could be quantified. The present value of the benefits of the preferred plan over a 50-year period is $417,000.00 while the present value of the costs is $154,000.00 for a benefit/cost ratio of 2.7/1.

A number of unquantified benefits do occur within the ONAs. These include habitat for grizzly bear, gray wolf, bighorn sheep, bald eagle and peregrine falcon. One value is the benefit to maintain wildlife recreation opportunities and ensure availability and access to wildlife recreation opportunities in the future. These recreational activities include camping, day hiking, backpacking, horseback riding, snowshoeing, photography, and bird-watching among others.

INVESTMENT ANALYSIS

An investment analysis was completed to evaluate the benefits and costs of implementing the preferred plan. This analysis is for a 50-year period and does not include all benefits or costs but only those that could be quantified.

The resource investment analysis (SageRam) program was used to calculate the present value of benefits and costs and the benefit/cost ratio. This analysis addresses proposed improvements and management costs along with the resource benefits to the BLM and others. The value of nonmarket prices (hunting, etc.) are based on the Forest Service benefit values for the 1985 program by resource activity. All dollar values are expressed in 1986 dollars and the investment analysis uses an interest rate of 8.625%. Table EA-4 shows benefits and costs without and with the Preferred Plan.

TABLE EA-4
BENEFITS AND COSTS WITHOUT AND WITH THE PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE

	Without Existing	With Action	Action
Benefits			
Livestock Forage (AUMs)	866	866	866
Deer Hunting (HDs)	430	430	3,300
Non-Consumptive Use (ADs)	180	180	1,420
Proposed Developments (dollars)			
Prescribed Burning			$ 2,400.00
Water Spring Dev.			2,500.00
Water Tanks & Pipelines			4,500.00
Fencing			15,000.00
Trailheads*			12,100.00
Parking Lots			107,300.00
Drinking Water			18,400.00
Present Value of Total Benefits		$417,000.00	
Present Value of Total Costs		$154,000.00	
Benefit/Cost Ratio		2.7/1	

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PUBLIC PARTICIPATION-COORDINATION

About 73 copies of the Coordinated Activity Plan proposal and associated data were sent as an informational brochure to various conservation groups, public agencies, private industry, and private citizens on February 3, 1988. A meeting was held with Teton County Commission staff and some commissioners February 11, 1988. The purpose was to apprise the Commission of the Preferred Alternative (AP) objectives, and to hear the Commission's views and concerns, if any.

Two public information dissemination and opinion collection meetings were held February 23 and 24, 1988, at Great Falls and Choteau respectively. About 40 citizens and public agency personnel were in attendance. Comments, oral and written, were received and can be found in the Supplemental Information Section of this AP.

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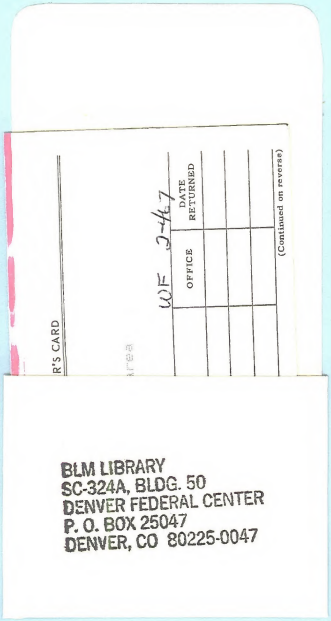
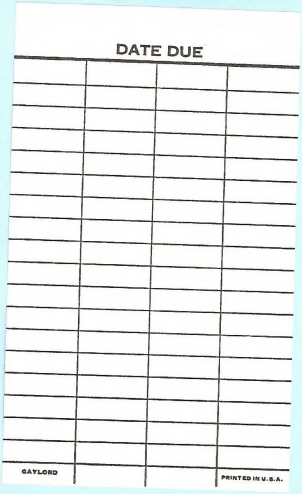
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